

80 PAGES  
SUGGESTED  
FOR MATURE  
READERS



MS. TREE  
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# Ms. TREE™

## QUARTERLY

A COMPLETE  
Ms. Tree Thriller  
by MAX ALLAN COLLINS  
and TERRY BEATTY

PLUS:

**MIDNIGHT™**

by Edward Gorman  
and Graham Nolan

**THE BUTCHER™**

by Mike Baron and  
Shea Anton Pensa



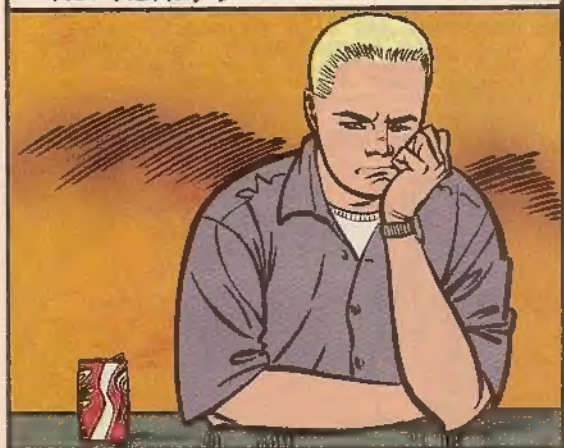


**E**VEN WHEN A COLLEGE IS IN THE BIG CITY, IT'S A LITTLE WORLD UNTO ITSELF. TONIGHT WAS **HOMECOMING** -- THE SMELL OF BURNING LEAVES WAS IN THE AIR, AND THE SMELL OF VICTORY. I WOULDN'T BE A PART OF IT, THOUGH.

I DIDN'T MAKE THE TEAM.



**N**OT EVEN THE JUNIOR VARSITY. SO MUCH FOR MY DREAMS OF BEING A FOOTBALL HERO. I WAS TOO SMALL, THEY SAID. NOT TALL ENOUGH, NOT HEAVY ENOUGH.



**B**EING ALL-STATE IN HIGH SCHOOL HADN'T COUNTED FOR JACK.



**M**Y NAME IS MICHAEL TREE. NO-- NOT HER. NOT THAT "FEMALE MIKE HAMMER" YOU'VE READ ABOUT IN THE PAPERS (PARTICULARLY IF YOU'RE AN "INQUIRING MIND THAT WANTS TO KNOW," CHECK-OUT-LANE TYPE).

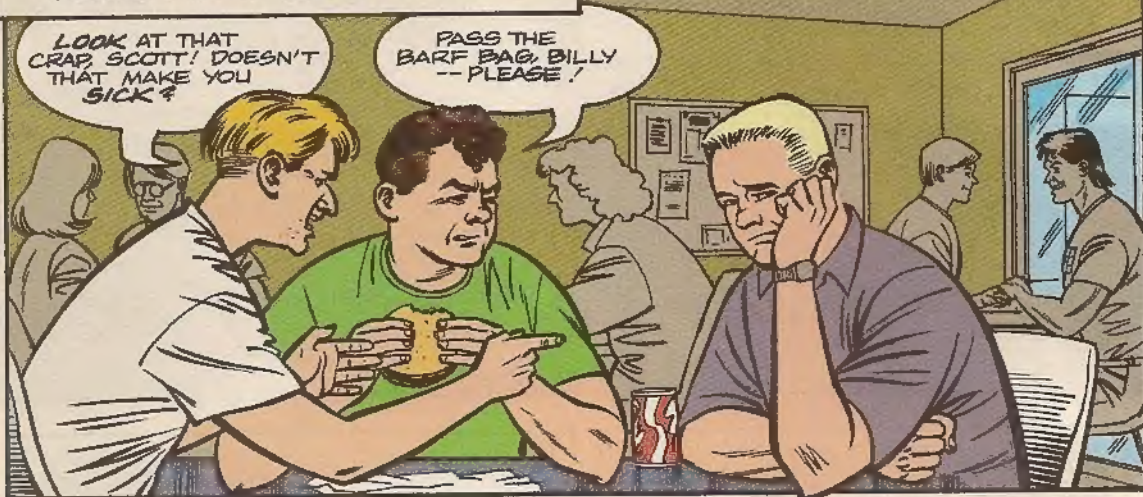


**S**HE'S **MS. TREE**. I'M HER STEPSON -- MIKE TREE, JR.. MY DAD WAS A PRIVATE EYE, TOO. HE GOT KILLED THE NIGHT HE MARRIED HER. NOT MUCH OF A MARRIAGE FOR EITHER OF 'EM, BUT SHE'S MY STEPMOM JUST THE SAME.





ANYWAY, I'M IN MY FIRST YEAR AT CITY COLLEGE, LAKESHORE CAMPUS, TAKING BUSINESS. BORED OUT OF MY MIND, WISHING I WERE TALLER, AND HEAVIER.



MAYBE I WOULDN'T HAVE FELT SO DOWN IF I'D HAD LISA AROUND, BUT MY GIRL HAD GONE TO VASSAR, IN KEEPING WITH HER LATE MOTHER'S WISHES. SHE SAID SHE LOVED ME, BUT RIGHT NOW WASN'T OUR TIME...



LISA AND ME, OUR "TIME" WAS IN THE FUTURE; ME AND GRIDIRON GLORY, THAT WAS IN THE PAST. THE PRESENT WAS DULL CLASSES AND A GRADE POINT LOWER THAN A DUCK'S ASS.



"SOMEBODY OUGHTA DO SOMETHING ABOUT THOSE FAGGOTS," BILLY SAID. "GUYS," I SAID, "NEVER MIND THEM... JUST BLOW IT OFF..."







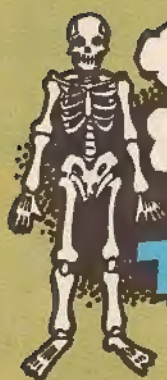












# SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

**I** DON'T REMEMBER SAYING THE THINGS THEY SAY I'D SAID. I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH AFTER I GOT THAT GUY ON THE GROUND...



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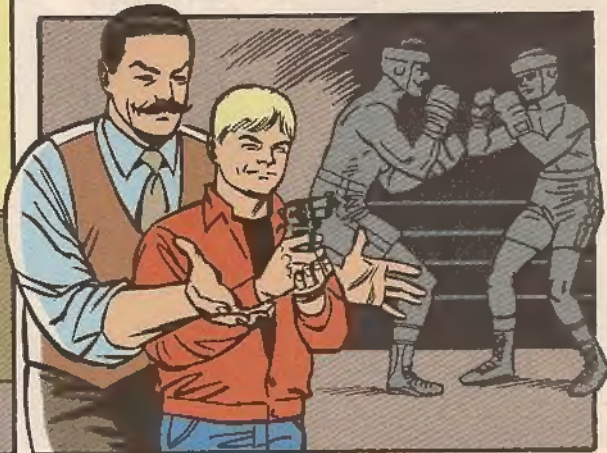
# Ms. TREE



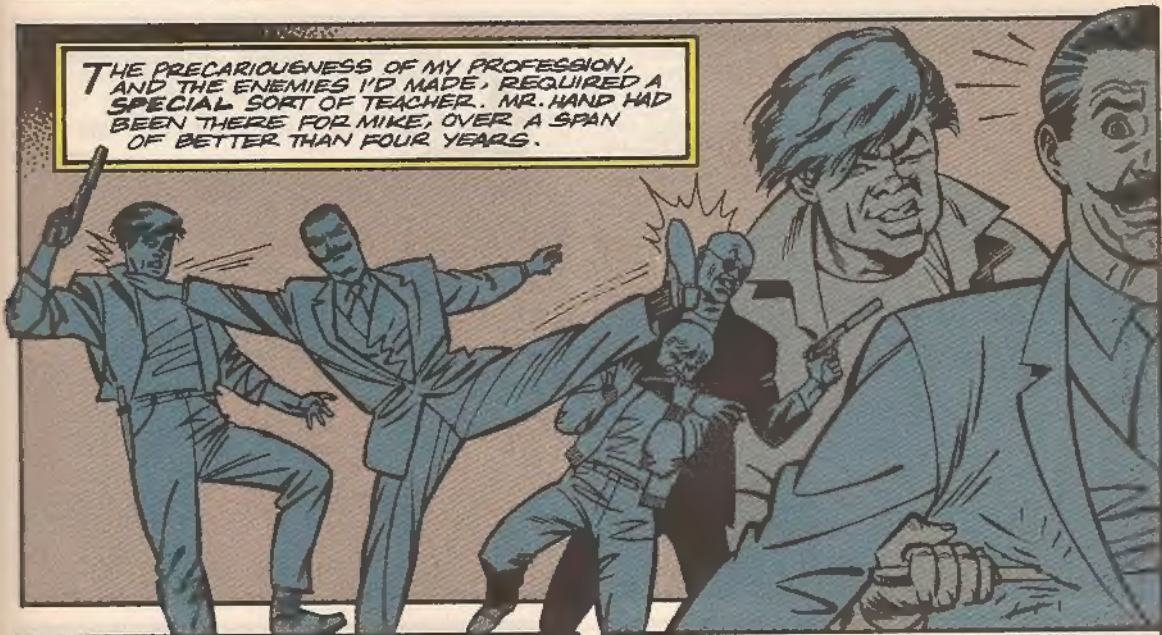
MY NAME IS MICHAEL TREE. I'VE BEEN MARRIED ONCE -- BRIEFLY -- AND MY ONLY CHILD IS MY STEPSON, MIKE TREE, JR. IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A LITTLE STRAINED BETWEEN US.



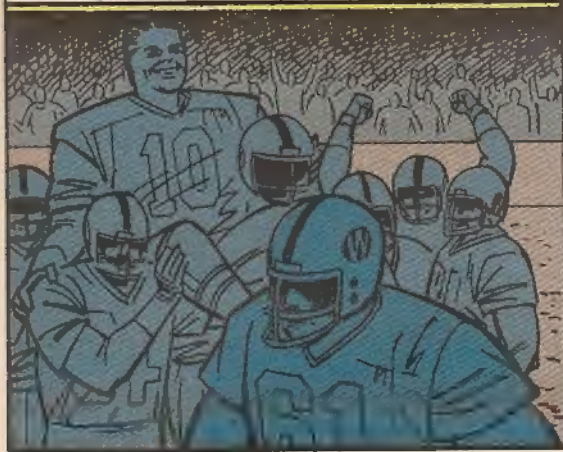
FOR A LONG TIME, MIKE HAD HAD A TUTOR: AN ENGLISHMAN NAMED BRYAN HAND, WHO WAS A SPECIALIST IN PLAYING BOTH BODYGUARD AND EDUCATOR. AND SOME OF WHAT HE TAUGHT MIKE WASN'T IN THE TEXTS.



THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF MY PROFESSION, AND THE ENEMIES I'D MADE, REQUIRED A SPECIAL SORT OF TEACHER. MR. HAND HAD BEEN THERE FOR MIKE, OVER A SPAN OF BETTER THAN FOUR YEARS.

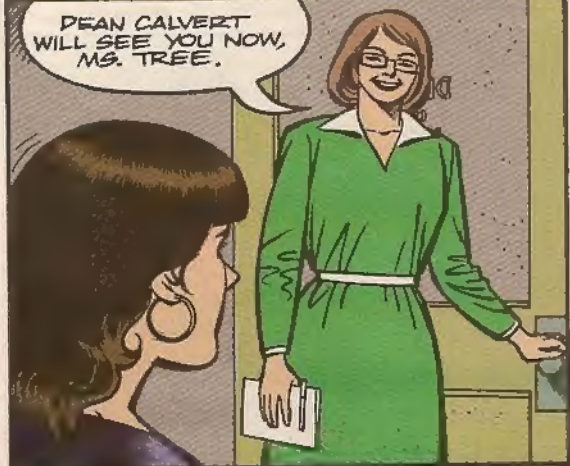


AFTER MR. HAND WAS INJURED, WE TRIED A PRIVATE ACADEMY FOR A WHILE, BUT EVENTUALLY MIKE WOUND UP IN PUBLIC SCHOOL. HE FIT IN FINE -- HE WAS A FOOTBALL STAR, AND HOMECOMING KING.



NOW THAT HE WAS IN COLLEGE, IT SEEMED A LITTLE LATE IN THE GAME FOR HIM -- AND ME -- TO BE CALLED TO THE "PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE."

DEAN CALVERT WILL SEE YOU NOW, MS. TREE.





THE DEAN OF MEN SHOOK HANDS WITH ME; HIS HANDSHAKE WAS AS FIRM AS HIS TIGHTLY DRAWN EXPRESSION. HE ASKED ME TO SIT DOWN.

... CAMPUS SECURITY BROKE IT UP, NEITHER BOY HAD TO BE HOSPITALIZED, THANKFULLY. THE COLLEGE INFIRMARY WAS ABLE TO PATCH THEM UP.

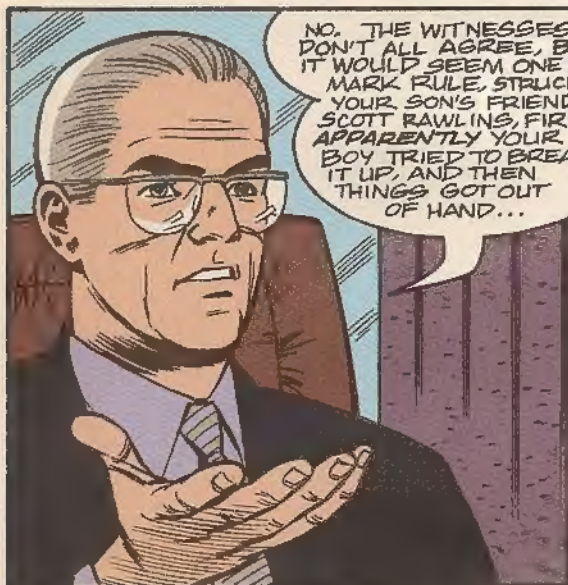


ARE THERE GOING TO BE ANY CHARGES FILED?



NO. THE WITNESSES DON'T ALL AGREE, BUT IT WOULD SEEM ONE BOY, MARK RULE, STRUCK YOUR SON'S FRIEND, SCOTT RAWLINS, FIRST. APPARENTLY YOUR BOY TRIED TO BREAK IT UP, AND THEN THINGS GOT OUT OF HAND...

WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND MS. TREE, IS THE VICIOUSNESS YOUR SON EXHIBITED. IF THE RULE BOY WASN'T SO PHYSICALLY FIT, I'M AFRAID MIKE MIGHT HAVE KILLED HIM.



Oh, dear.

"DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHY YOUR STEPSON WOULD DISPLAY SUCH OVERT HATRED? AS I'VE EXPLAINED, THE INCIDENT APPARENTLY BEGAN WITH MIKE'S FRIENDS BAITING RULE AND HIS FRIEND, AND YOUR STEPSON WAS SHOUTING DECIDEDLY FOUL HOMOPHOBIC EPITHETS."



"DEAN CALVERT," I SAID, "DID YOU EVER HEAR OF A GUY NAMED WILLIAM ROBERT ROGERS?"





GOOD GOD... **BILLY BOB**.  
THE MASS MURDERER...  
YOU WERE INVOLVED  
IN THAT, WEREN'T YOU?  
I READ ABOUT THAT IN  
THE PAPERS, AT THE TIME.



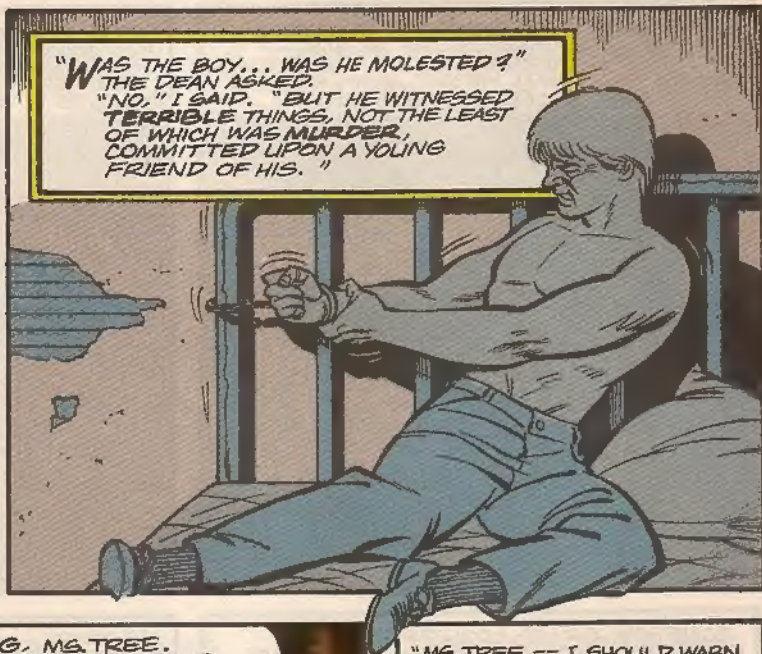
"YES," I SAID. "I WAS INVOLVED  
IN IT. I SHOT THAT SICK  
BASTARD. HE KILLED  
SEVENTEEN BOYS -- AFTER  
HE WAS DONE WITH THEM."



MIKE WOULD HAVE  
BEEN VICTIM NUMBER  
**EIGHTEEN**, IF I HADN'T  
GOTTEN THERE, FIRST.



"WAS THE BOY... WAS HE MOLESTED?"  
THE DEAN ASKED.  
"NO," I SAID. "BUT HE WITNESSED  
TERRIBLE THINGS, NOT THE LEAST  
OF WHICH WAS MURDER,  
COMMITTED UPON A YOUNG  
FRIEND OF HIS."



MIKE NEEDS COUNSELING. MS. TREE.  
HE OBVIOUSLY HAS A GOOD DEAL OF RAGE  
BOTTLED UP IN HIM. AND, PERHAPS, YOU  
HAVE PROVIDED A ROLE MODEL OF  
VIOLENCE, WHICH MAY NEED TO BE  
ADDRESSED.



I'LL  
TALK TO  
MIKE.



"MS. TREE -- I SHOULD WARN  
YOU ... I'LL CONTAIN THIS  
AS BEST I CAN. BUT BE  
PREPARED FOR THE WORST  
... THIS BOY, MARK RULE,  
WRITES FOR THE **BLADE**.  
YOU DO KNOW WHAT  
THAT IS ?"



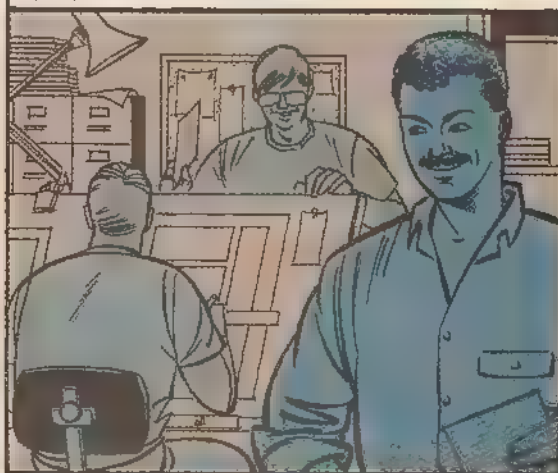


I CAN'T SAY I DO...

IT BEGAN TWO YEARS AGO, HERE ON CAMPUS... A LITERARY MAGAZINE WITH FULL COLLEGE APPROVAL.

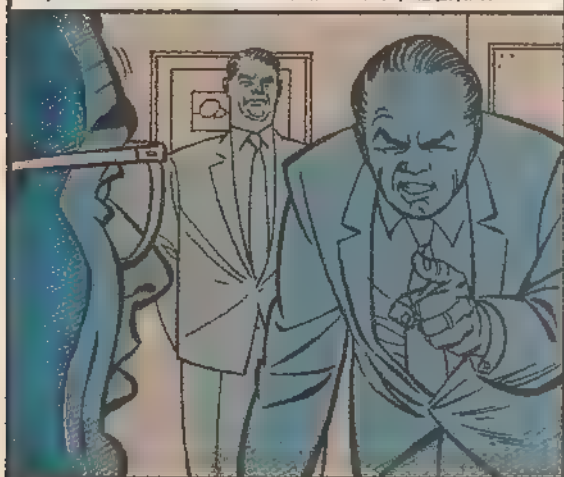


"THE EDITOR WAS A YOUNG MAN NAMED ALEXANDER GRAIT. A TALENTED YOUNG MAN WHO HAPPENS TO BE GAY, AND WHO STAFFED THE **BLADE** WITH OTHERS LIKE HIM."



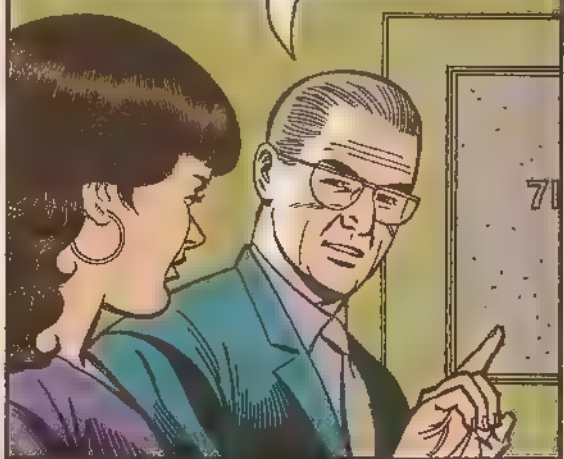
"SOON, RATHER **EXPLICIT** GAY MATERIAL BEGAN APPEARING IN THE **BLADE** -- FICTION, PHOTOGRAPHS, MILITANT EDITORIALS. THERE WAS, SHALL WE SAY, **DISPLEASURE** EXPRESSED BY CERTAIN KEY ALUMNI."

"THE PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED **DISENFRANCHISING** THE PUBLICATION, AND I AGREED. I THREW THEM OFF CAMPUS. THERE WAS QUITE A FUSS... THE A.C.L.U. GOT INVOLVED."



SOMEHOW GRAIT ACQUIRED THE FINANCIAL BACKING TO CONTINUE. HE BEGAN LOCALLY, IN AN **UNDERGROUND** MANNER, AND IT JUST TOOK OFF. RECENTLY, I UNDERSTAND, THE **BLADE** ATTAINED NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION.

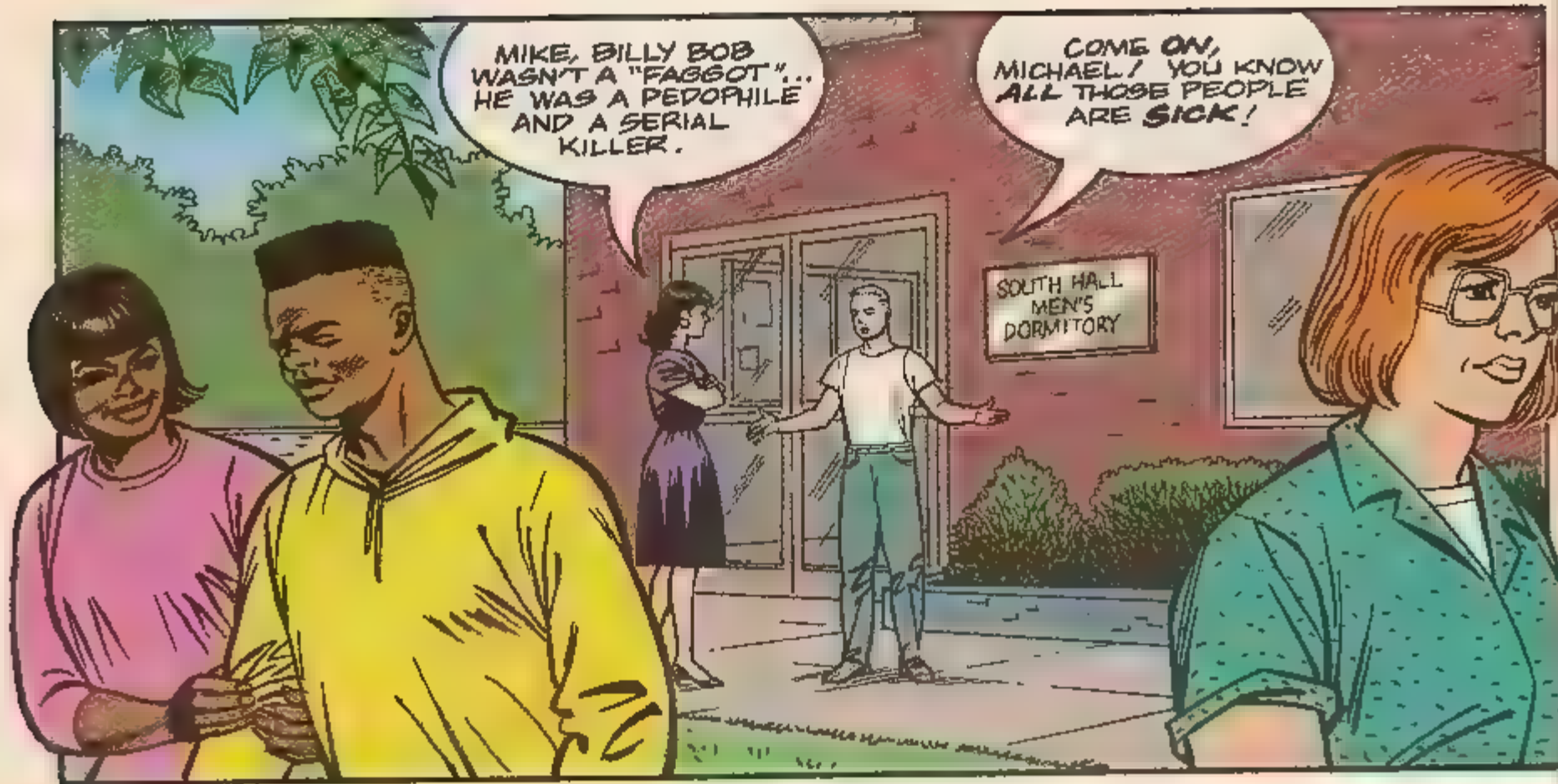
MS. TREE -- GRAIT MADE HIS MARK WHEN HE STARTED MUCKRAKING TACTICS ... HE ALL BUT **INVENTED** THE CURRENT PRACTICE OF "OUTING," FOR EXAMPLE...











MIKE, BILLY BOB  
WASN'T A "FAGGOT"...  
HE WAS A PEDOPHILE  
AND A SERIAL  
KILLER.

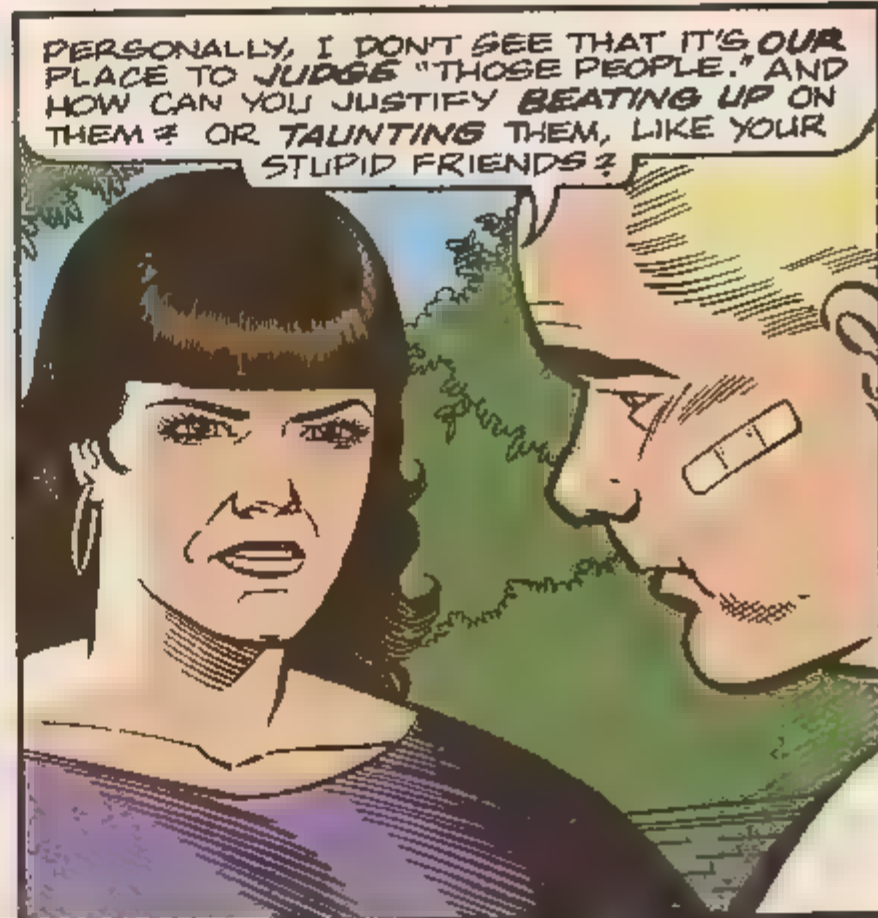
COME ON,  
MICHAEL! YOU KNOW  
ALL THOSE PEOPLE  
ARE **SICK**!

SOUTH HALL  
MEN'S  
DORMITORY



THOSE  
PEOPLE  
?

QUEERS. FAGGS.  
I DON'T HOLD 'EM ANY  
GRUDGE, BUT THEY'RE  
SICK IN THE HEAD,  
AMONG OTHER  
PLACES.



PERSONALLY, I DON'T SEE THAT IT'S OUR  
PLACE TO **JUDGE** "THOSE PEOPLE." AND  
HOW CAN YOU JUSTIFY **BEATING UP** ON  
THEM? OR **TAUNTING** THEM, LIKE YOUR  
STUPID FRIENDS?



I DIDN'T START IT. I  
NEVER CALLED A FAG  
A NAME IN MY LIFE.  
I MIND MY OWN  
BUSINESS.



YOU'RE GURE  
YOU WANT TO STAY  
IN THE DORM  
TONIGHT...

YEAH.  
SEE YA THIS  
WEEKEND.



THE NEXT DAY I WENT ON WITH MY LIFE,  
AND BUSINESS, AND -- FRANKLY --  
MIKE, JR. WAS PRETTY MUCH OUT  
OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND.

IS THE KUNDEL CASE  
FILE READY,  
EFFIE?

RIGHT  
HERE.

BUT THINGS WERE HAPPENING  
ON CAMPUS THAT WOULD  
HAVE DISTURBED ME,  
HAD I KNOWN...

LOOK AT THOSE  
FAGS, AND THEIR  
STUPID DEMONSTRATION  
... WHAT DO THEY THINK  
THIS IS, THE 60'S?

FORGET IT, BILLY.  
LET'S JUST GET  
TO CLASS.



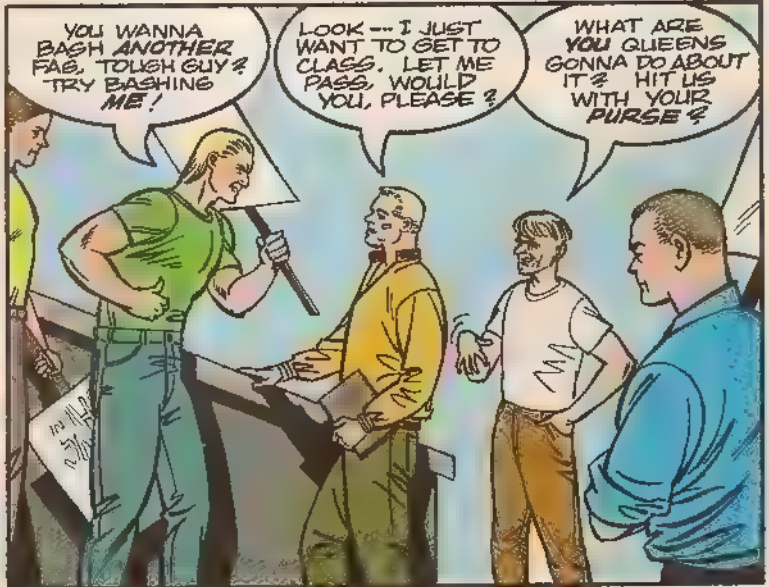
THAT'S  
THE GUY!  
THE ONE WHO  
ATTACKED  
MARK!



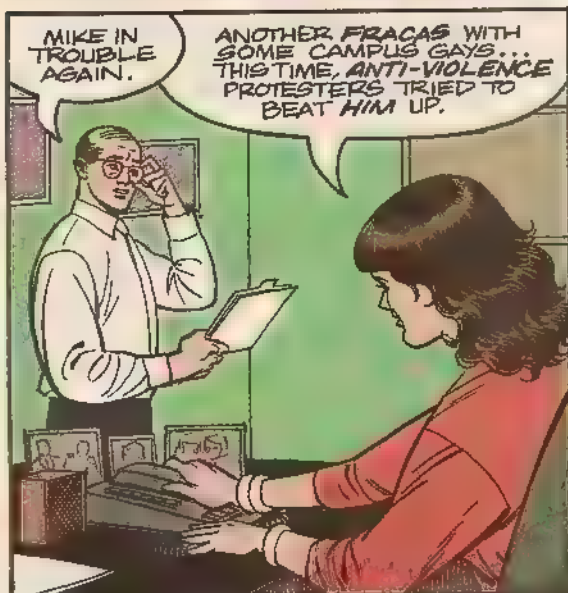
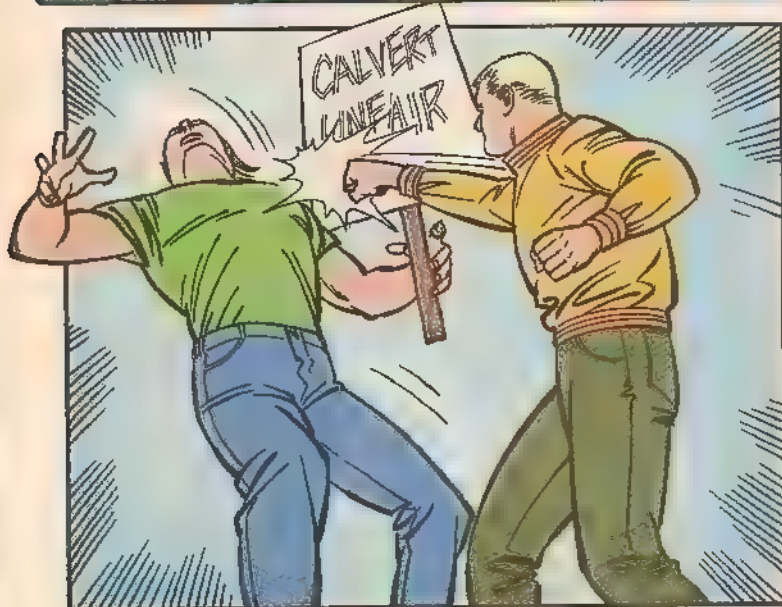
YOU WANNA  
BASH ANOTHER  
FAG, TOUGH GUY?  
TRY BASHING  
ME!

LOOK -- I JUST  
WANT TO GET TO  
CLASS. LET ME  
PASS, WOULD  
YOU, PLEASE?

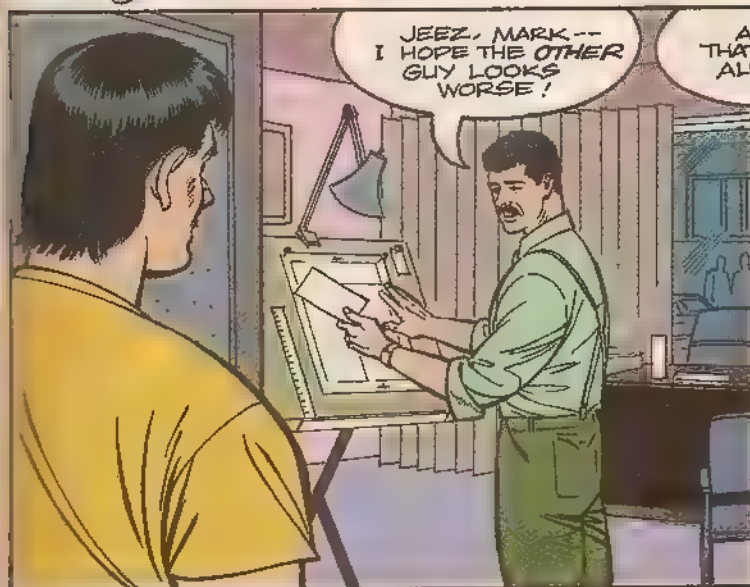
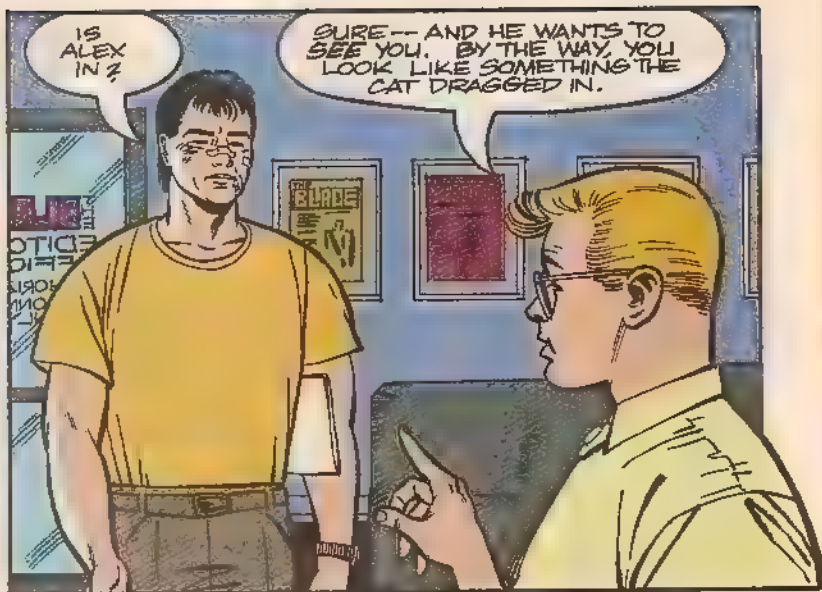
WHAT ARE  
YOU QUEENS  
GONNA DO ABOUT  
IT? HIT US  
WITH YOUR  
PURSE?











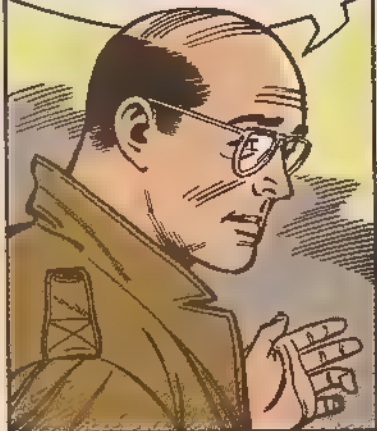
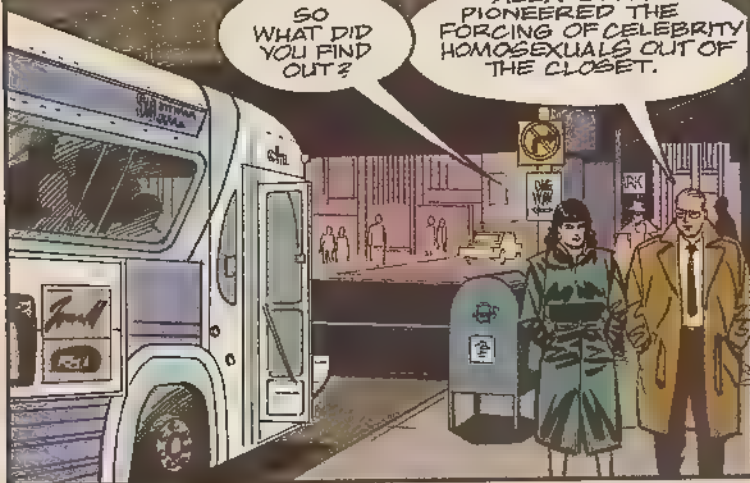


"YOU'RE RIGHT, MARK - SHE'S RIPE FOR AN OUTING."

SO WHAT DID YOU FIND OUT?

YOUR FRIEND DEAN CALVERT WAS RIGHT... ALEX GRAIT PIONEERED THE FORCING OF CELEBRITY HOMOSEXUALS OUT OF THE CLOSET.

THE NOTION IS THAT "OUTING" WILL HELP DEVELOP POSITIVE **ROLE MODELS**... BY SHOWING THAT A LOT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE ARE REALLY GAY.



I'VE READ ABOUT IT. I THINK IT STINKS. IT'S AN OUTRAGEOUS INVASION OF **PRIVACY** -- IT'S A KIND OF INTELLECTUAL RAPE.

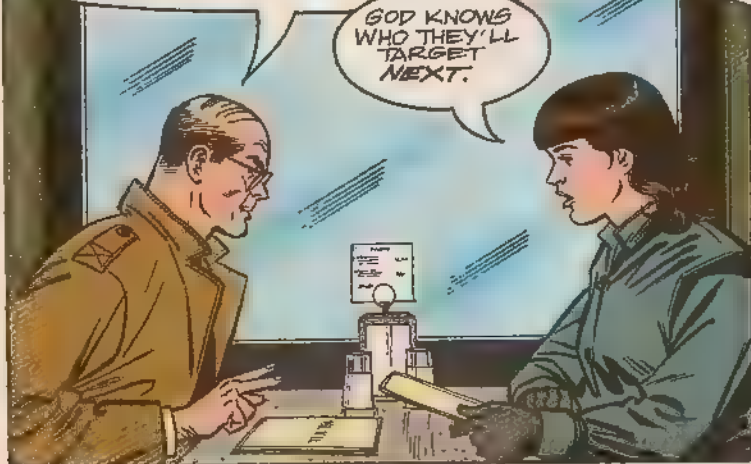
APPARENTLY MANY GAYS WOULD AGREE WITH YOU... BUT OTHERS DON'T. AND RIGHT OR WRONG, IT'S BUILT THE **BLADE** UP FROM AN UNDERGROUND PUBLICATION INTO A NATIONAL MAGAZINE.



IN ITS LAST TWO ISSUES ALONE, THE **BLADE** HAS RUN OUTING ARTICLES ON A BASEBALL STAR AND A POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL INDUSTRIALIST.

GOD KNOWS WHO THEY'LL TARGET NEXT.

THAT'S THE INTERESTING PART. MY SOURCE SAYS YOU'RE ON THEIR HIT LIST. WHAT'S WRONG, MS. TREE? WEREN'T YOU AWARE YOU'RE A LESBIAN?





"ROGER, THAT'S LUDICROUS,"  
I SAID. "I KNOW," HE SAID.  
"IT'S SILLY AND NASTY...  
PARTICULARLY THE LATTER,  
CONSIDERING THAT ANOTHER  
PARTY IS GOING TO BE HURT."  
BACK AT THE OFFICE, I  
CALLED MY ATTORNEY ON  
THE SPEAKER PHONE ---

YOU KNOW,  
I DON'T  
REALLY  
CARE...

THE CHARGE IS  
FALSE, BUT I'M USED  
TO FALSE THINGS BEING  
SAID ABOUT ME IN  
THE PRESS. BESIDES,  
IF I FIGHT IT...

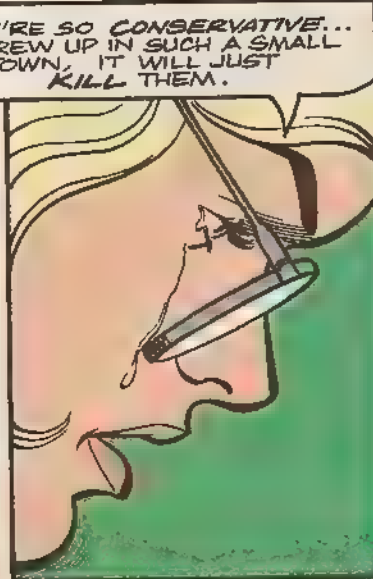
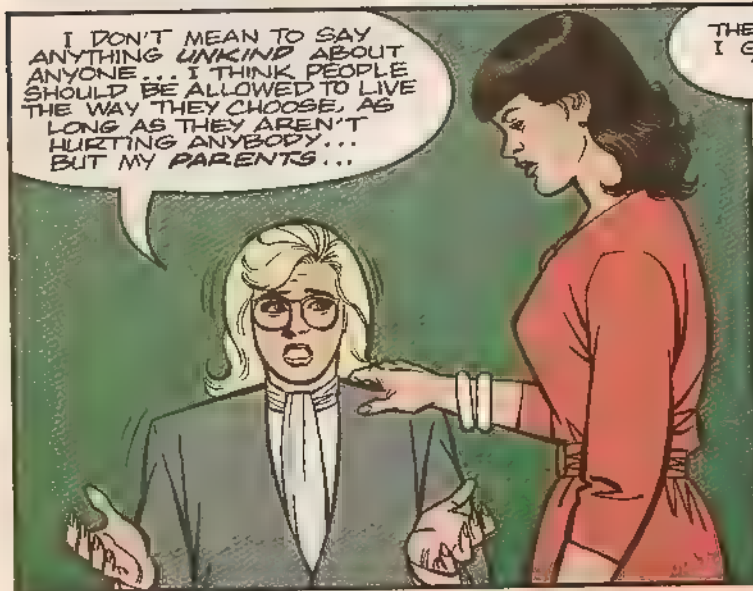
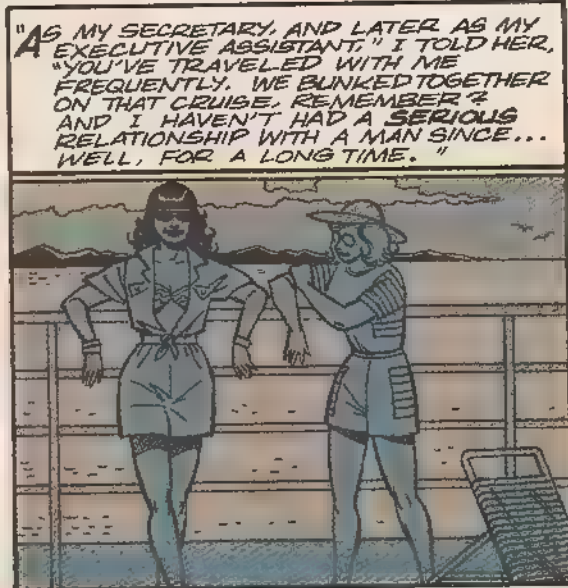
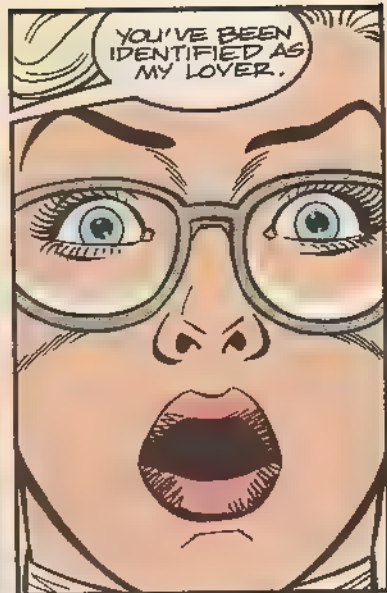
YOU'D BE  
PUBLICLY PERCEIVED  
AS HOMOPHOBIC. BY  
INVOKING LIBEL LAWS,  
YOU'D BE SAYING,  
IN EFFECT, THAT  
HOMOSEXUALITY  
IS WRONG.

BUT SOMEONE  
INNOCENT IS GOING  
TO BE HURT.

MY.  
WHAT A RARE  
OCCURRENCE.

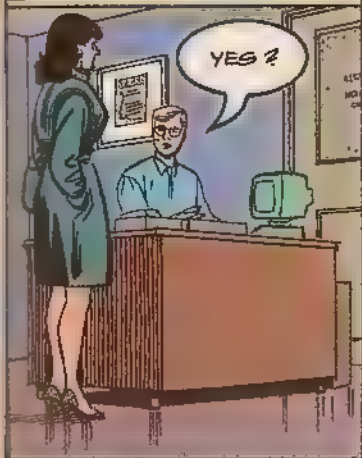
YOU  
WANTED ME,  
MS. TREE?



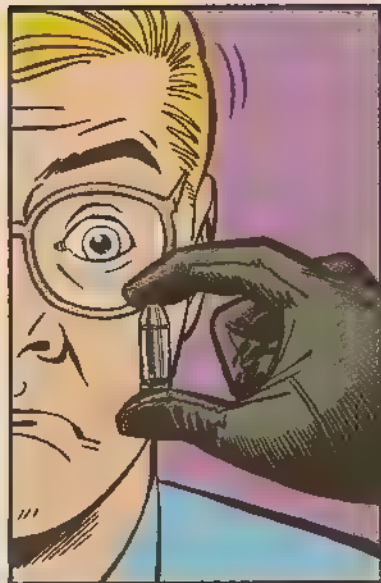
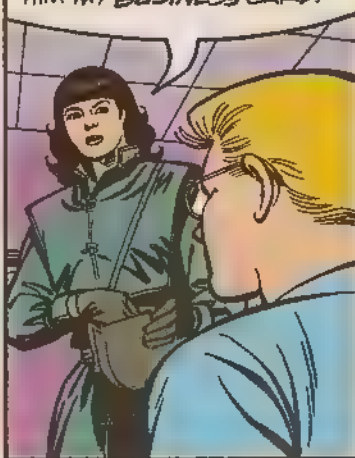




"OH, MS. TREE, ISN'T THERE ANYTHING THAT CAN BE DONE?"  
"MAYBE SOMETHING," I SAID.



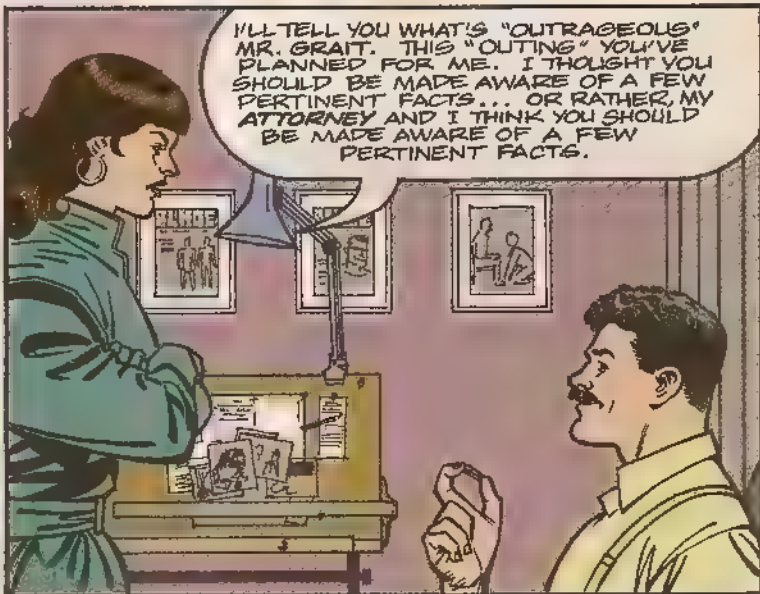
TELL ALEXANDER THE GREAT THAT MS. TREE IS HERE TO SEE HIM.  
I DON'T HAVE AN APPOINTMENT, BUT SHOW HIM MY BUSINESS CARD.



YOU DO HAVE STYLE, MS. TREE. I'VE ALWAYS ADMIRERD THAT ABOUT YOU. THAT FASHION LAYOUT IN *INTERVIEW?* OUTRAGEOUS. SUCH HIGH CAMP.



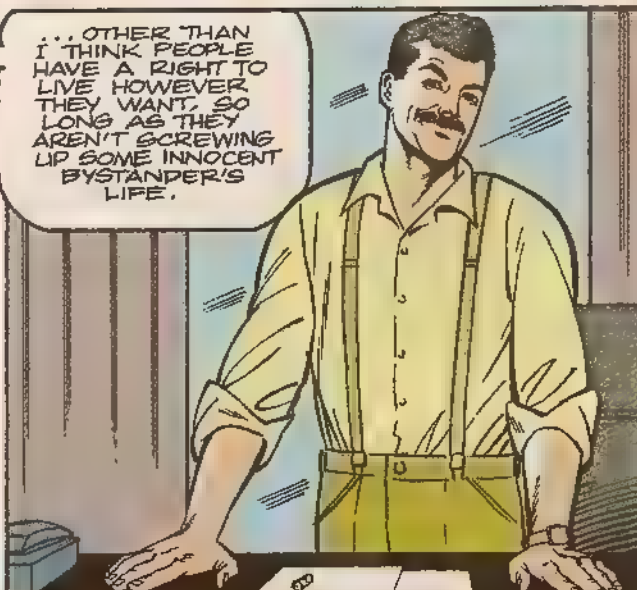
I'LL TELL YOU WHAT'S "OUTRAGEOUS" MR. GRAIT. THIS "OUTING" YOU'VE PLANNED FOR ME. I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF A FEW PERTINENT FACTS... OR RATHER, MY ATTORNEY AND I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF A FEW PERTINENT FACTS.



I'M NOT GAY. I HAVE NOTHING AGAINST GAYS. I HAVE NO PARTICULAR OPINION ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY ONE WAY OR ANOTHER...



... OTHER THAN I THINK PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE HOWEVER THEY WANT, SO LONG AS THEY AREN'T SCREWING UP SOME INNOCENT BYSTANDER'S LIFE.



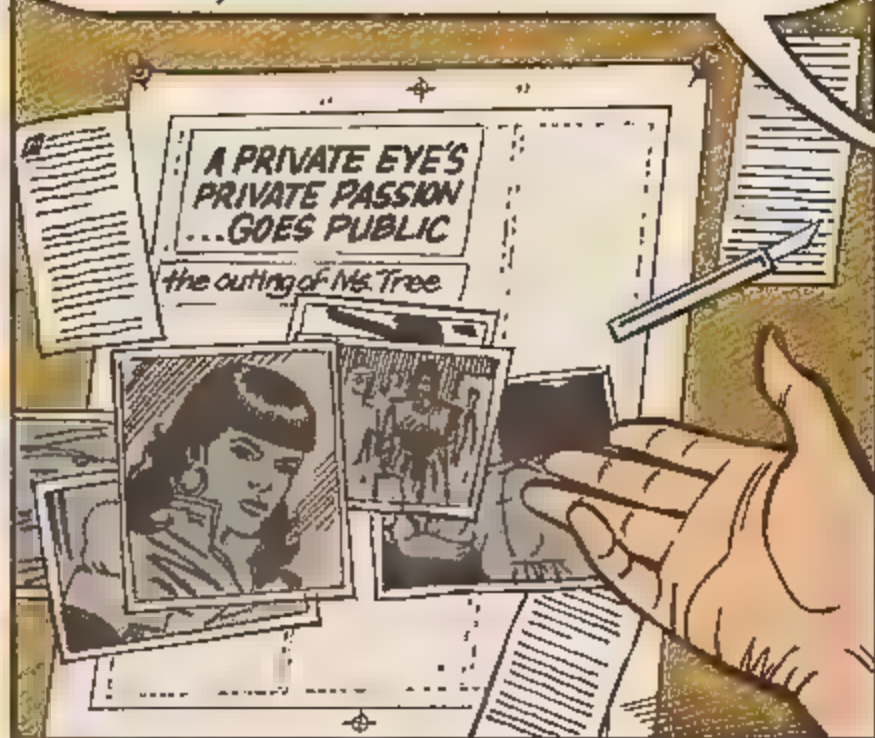


THERE'S VERY LITTLE "INNOCENT" ABOUT YOU, MS. TREE. YOU HAVE A BOX-SCORE ON MURDER AND MAYHEM THAT WOULD MAKE **RAMBO** PALE... AND **HE'S** A FICTIONAL CHARACTER...

TAKE A LOOK AT THIS.



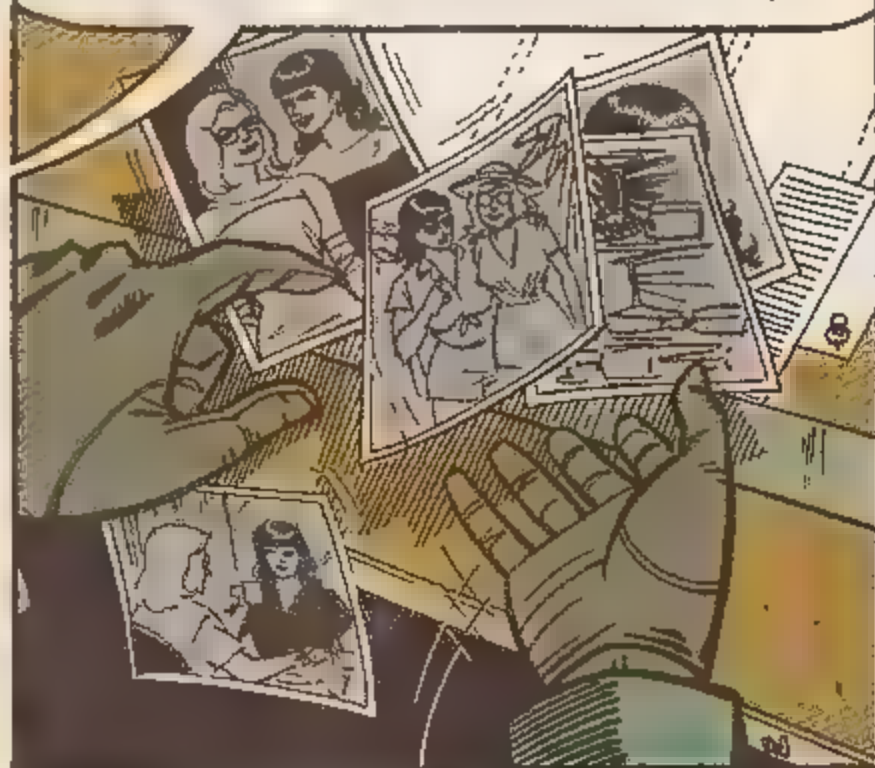
WE'VE DONE OUR HOMEWORK. WE HAVE THE **PHOTOS** TO BACK OUR STORY UP... AND **AFFIDAVITS** FROM A NUMBER OF WITNESSES TO YOUR LIAISONS.



AS FOR YOU AND YOUR ATTORNEY, YOU'RE A **PUBLIC FIGURE**, MS. TREE -- YOU HAVE TO TAKE YOUR LUMPS. COMES WITH THE TERRITORY.



THIS IS **EXACTLY** WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT! YOU'RE INVADING THE PRIVACY OF A WOMAN WHO IS **INNOCENT** OF THESE CHARGES!



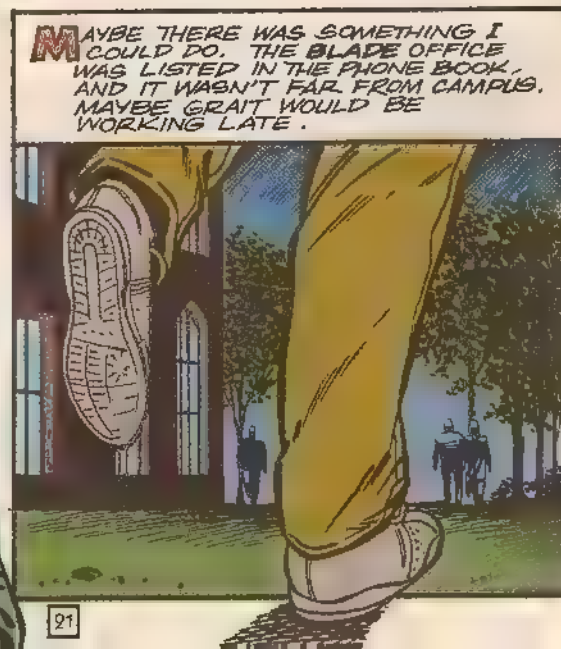
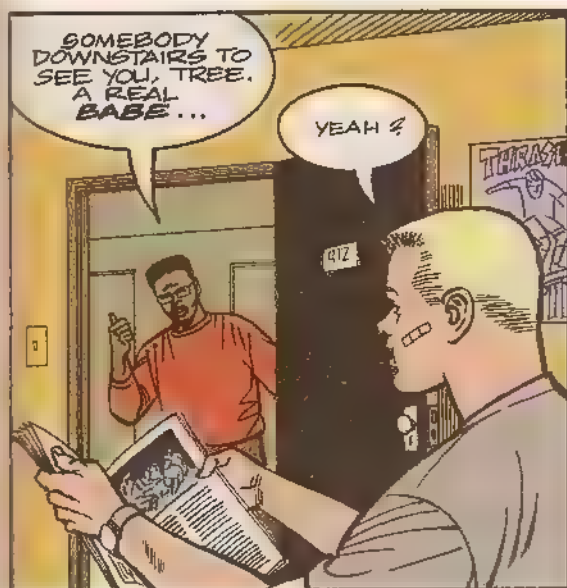
THESE ARE NOT "CHARGES," MS. TREE ... THE **BLADE** FINDS NOTHING AT ALL "WRONG" WITH HOMOSEXUALITY. AND IF YOU -- AND YOUR ATTORNEY -- WOULD CARE TO BRAND YOURSELF AS **ANTI-GAY**, THAT'S UP TO YOU.



I'M **NOT** ANTI-GAY -- I'M ANTI-**SLIMEBALL** ... AND YOU QUALIFY! PRINT THAT GARBAGE AND I WILL DO SOME GAY BASHING... AND GUESS WHAT GAY I INTEND TO BASH?!!

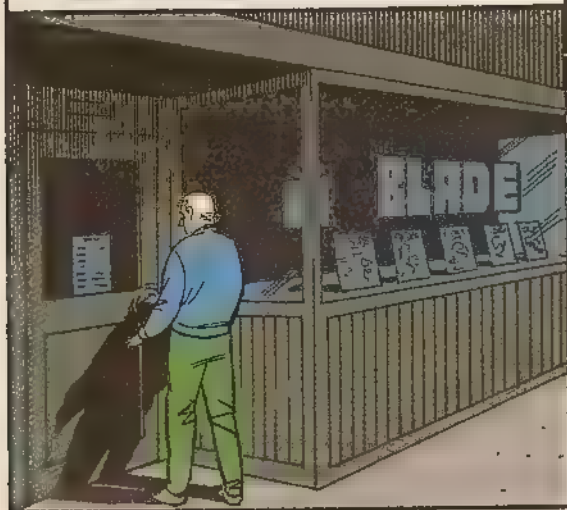




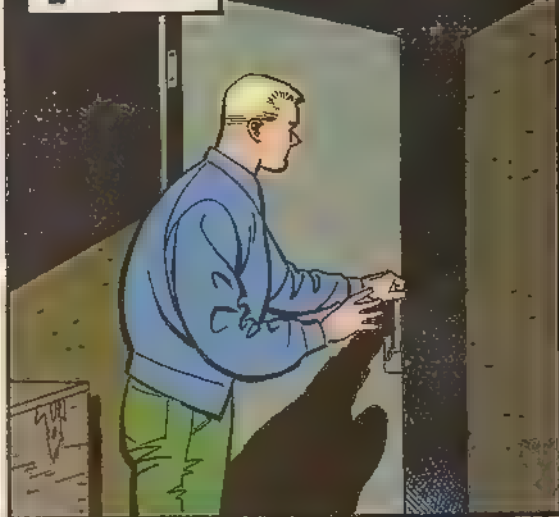




**T**HE FRONT DOOR WAS LOCKED BUT I  
COULD SEE A LIGHT ON INSIDE.  
MAYBE THERE WAS A BACK WAY IN...



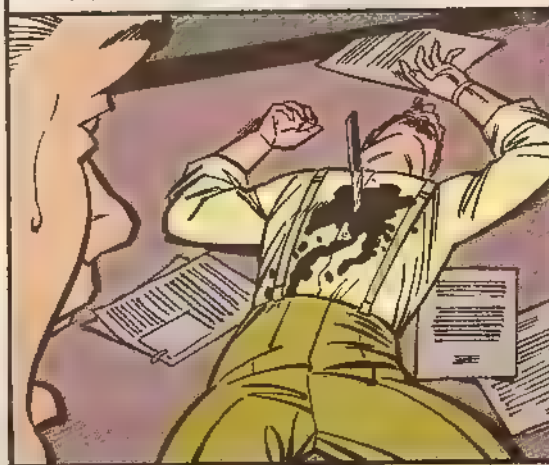
**T**HERE WAS.



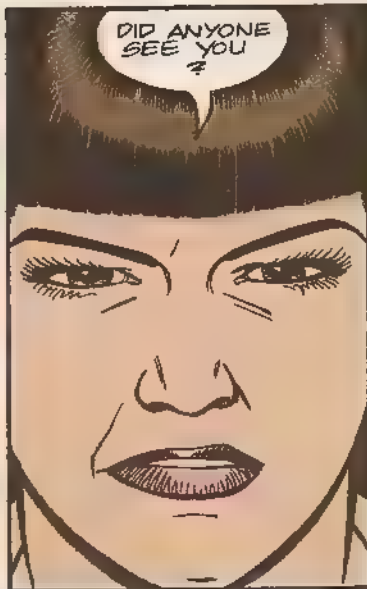
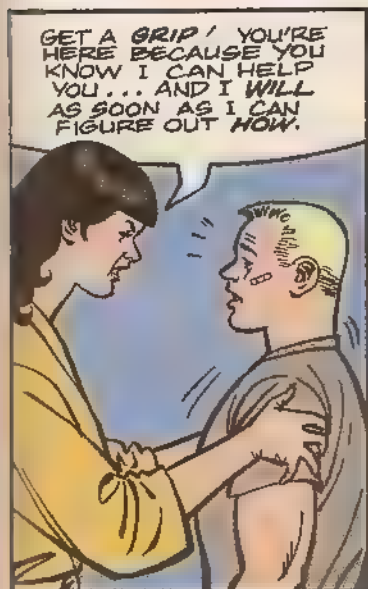
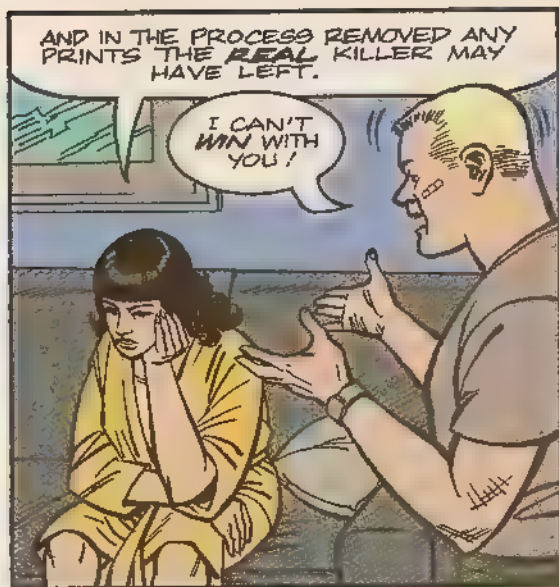
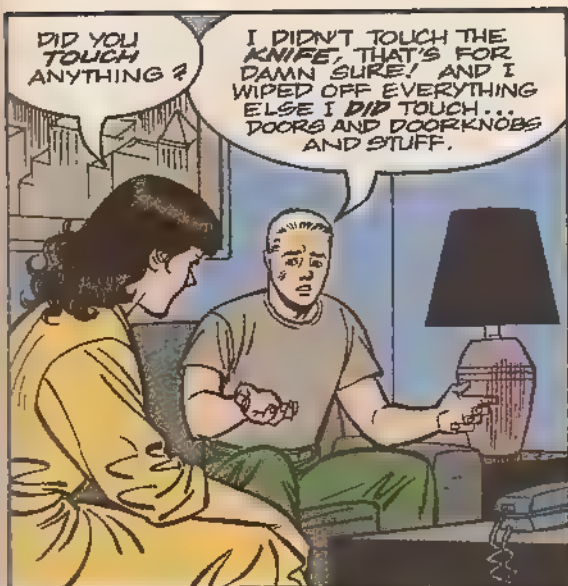
**W**HEN I KNOCKED ON THE DOOR, IT  
OPENED... MUST'VE BEEN AJAR...



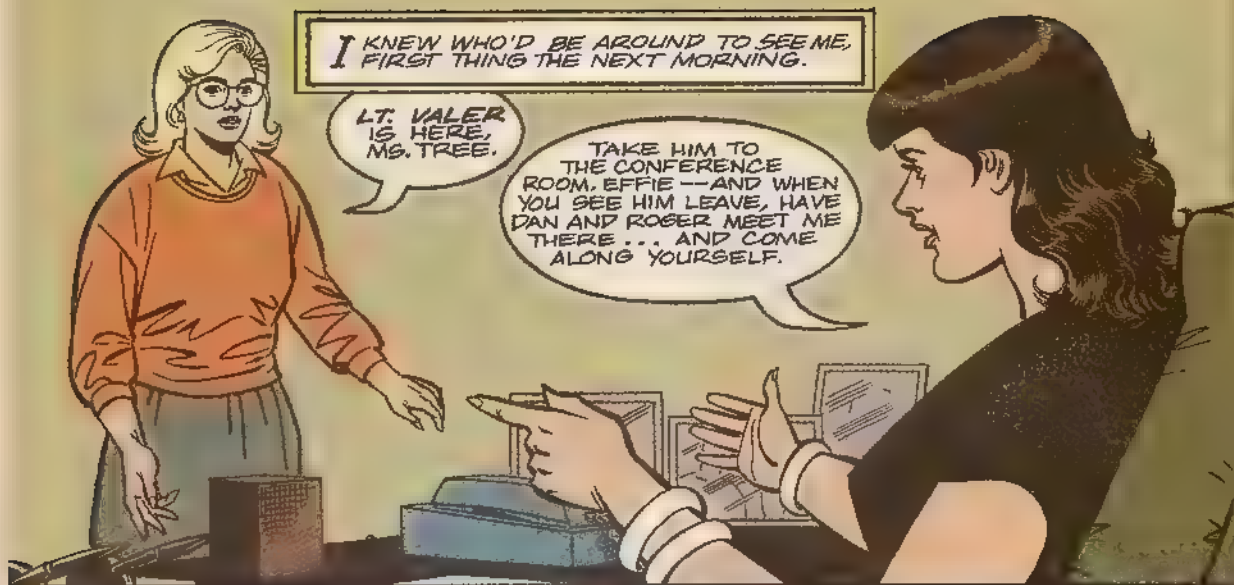
**S**OMEBODY ELSE HAD ALREADY  
TALKED TO GRAIT TONIGHT.  
I DIDN'T KNOW IF THE BLADE HAD  
BEEN THE TOPIC OF DISCUSSION,  
BUT SOMEBODY SURE HAD MADE  
THEIR POINT WITH A BLADE.











I KNEW WHO'D BE AROUND TO SEE ME, FIRST THING THE NEXT MORNING.

LT. VALER IS HERE, MS. TREE.

TAKE HIM TO THE CONFERENCE ROOM. EFFIE -- AND WHEN YOU SEE HIM LEAVE, HAVE DAN AND ROGER MEET ME THERE... AND COME ALONG YOURSELF.



GRAIT TOLD HIS PEOPLE YOU **THREATENED** HIM WHEN YOU WENT TO SEE HIM YESTERDAY AFTERNOON... AND THE FRONT OF HIS SHIRT WAS CORROBORATION.

DO TELL.



IF I KILLED EVERYBODY I **THREATENED**, RAFF, I'D BE A BUSY GIRL.



YOU ARE A BUSY GIRL. DID YOU KILL HIM?



NO. I WAS CONSIDERING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST HIM. CHECK WITH MY ATTORNEY -- HE'LL CONFIRM AS MUCH.

OH -- AM I LEAVING ALREADY?



RAFE DIDN'T.  
DIDN'T ASK ME FOR  
A STATEMENT OR  
ANYTHING.

HE DOESN'T KNOW YOU'RE  
A SUSPECT YET. BUT HE WILL  
SOON ENOUGH. AND HE'LL  
BE ONTO MIKE, TOO.

WHAT'S ALL  
THIS ABOUT,  
ANYWAY?

DAN GREEN'S RELATIVE YOUTH WAS  
OFFSET BY INTELLIGENCE AND  
TOUGHNESS. IN HIS WAY, DAN WAS  
AS GOOD A DETECTIVE AS ROGER.  
I FILLED HIM IN.

WE NEED TO STAY  
A STEP AHEAD OF  
RAFE. IF WE WANT  
TO PROTECT EFFIE  
AND MIKE.

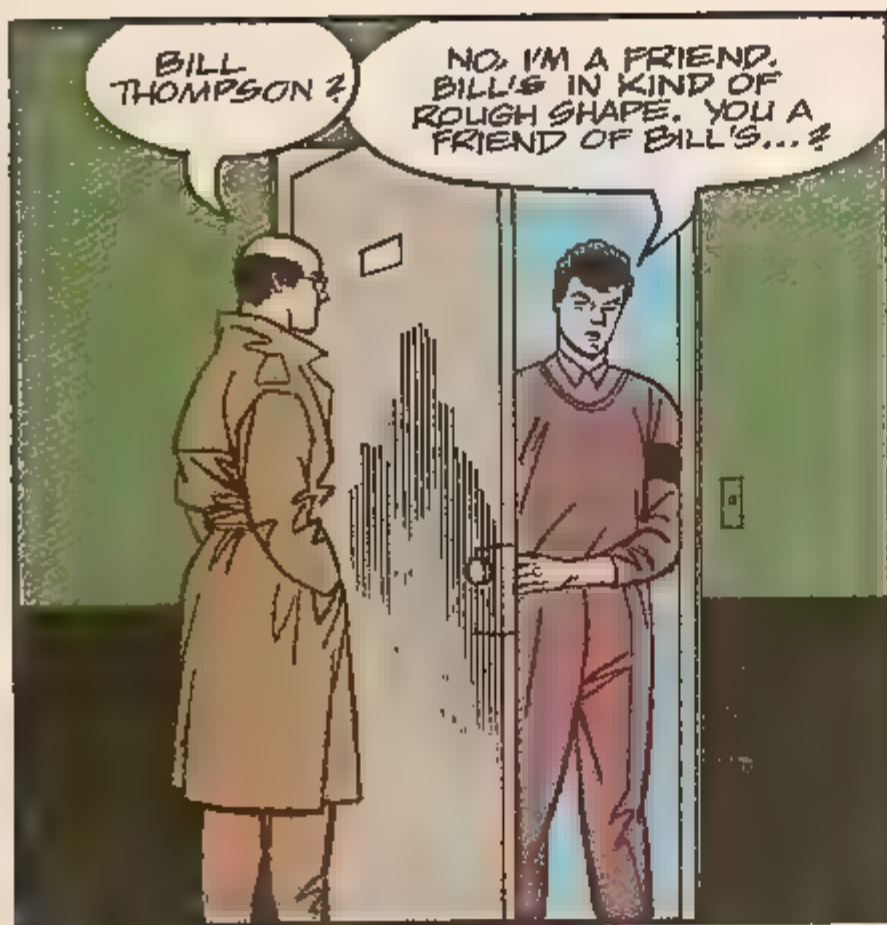
THAT'S WHY WE'RE DROPPING  
EVERYTHING, AND ALL THREE OF US  
ARE GOING OUT INTO THE FIELD ON  
THIS... RIGHT NOW.

DAN, I WANT YOU TO TALK  
TO **MARK RULE** AND HIS  
FRIEND **STEVE SIMMONS**,  
THE OTHER BOY INVOLVED  
IN THAT FIRST INCIDENT  
AT THE COLLEGE.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF AS  
A DETECTIVE WORKING  
ON THE MURDER, BUT  
**DON'T** MENTION ME OR  
TREE INVESTIGATIONS, INC.  
IT'LL ONLY MAKE  
RULE **HOSTILE**.

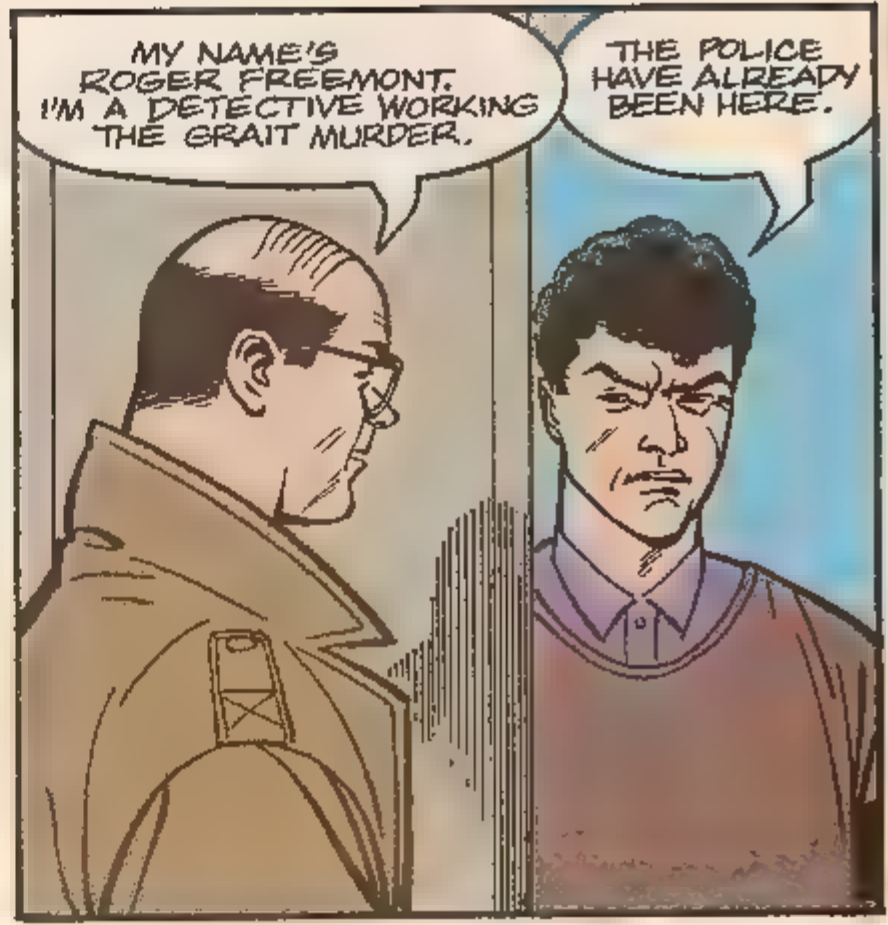
ROGER, I CALLED  
**CRAIG LEVY** AT THE **TRIB**--  
HE HAD THE BYLINE ON  
THE STORY THIS MORNING  
ABOUT THE MURDER--  
AND HE GAVE ME THE  
NAME OF **ALEX GRAY'S**  
LOVER...





BILL THOMPSON?

NO, I'M A FRIEND. BILL'S IN KIND OF ROUGH SHAPE. YOU A FRIEND OF BILL'S...?



MY NAME'S ROGER FREEMONT. I'M A DETECTIVE WORKING THE GRAITH MURDER.

THE POLICE HAVE ALREADY BEEN HERE.



I'M A PRIVATE DETECTIVE.

I DON'T THINK...

JAMES, WHAT IS IT?



MR. THOMPSON? I'M A DETECTIVE INVESTIGATING MR. GRAITH'S MURDER. IF I COULD HAVE A FEW MOMENTS...?

HE'S A P.I.



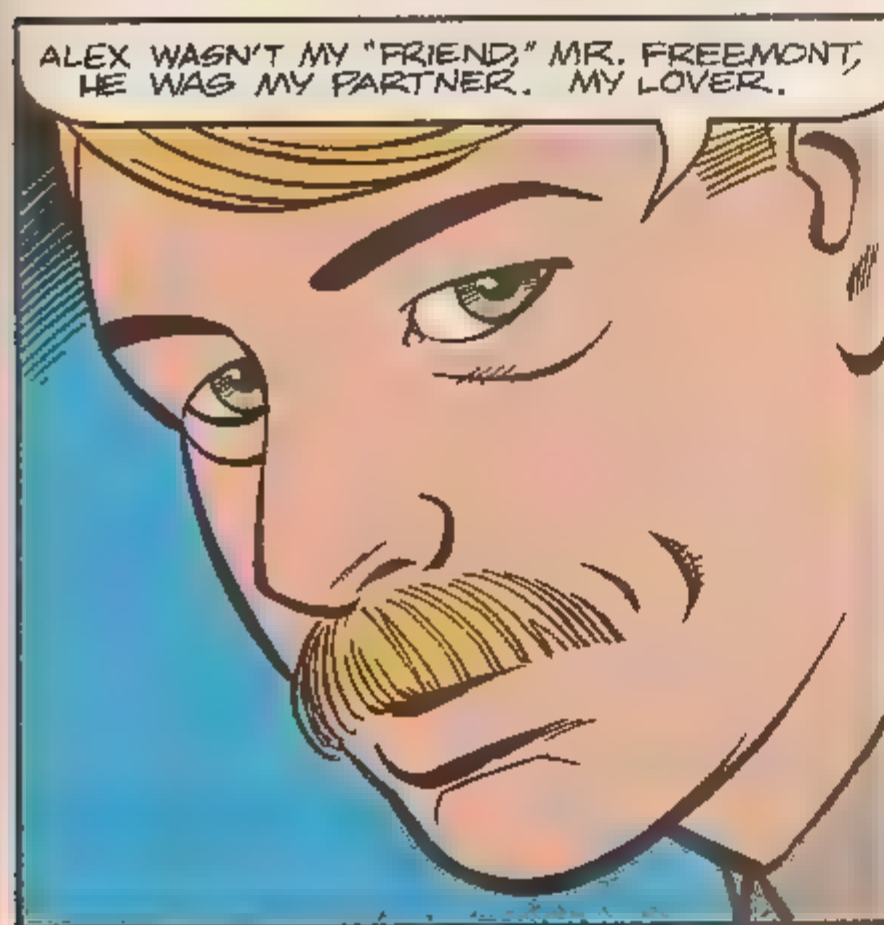
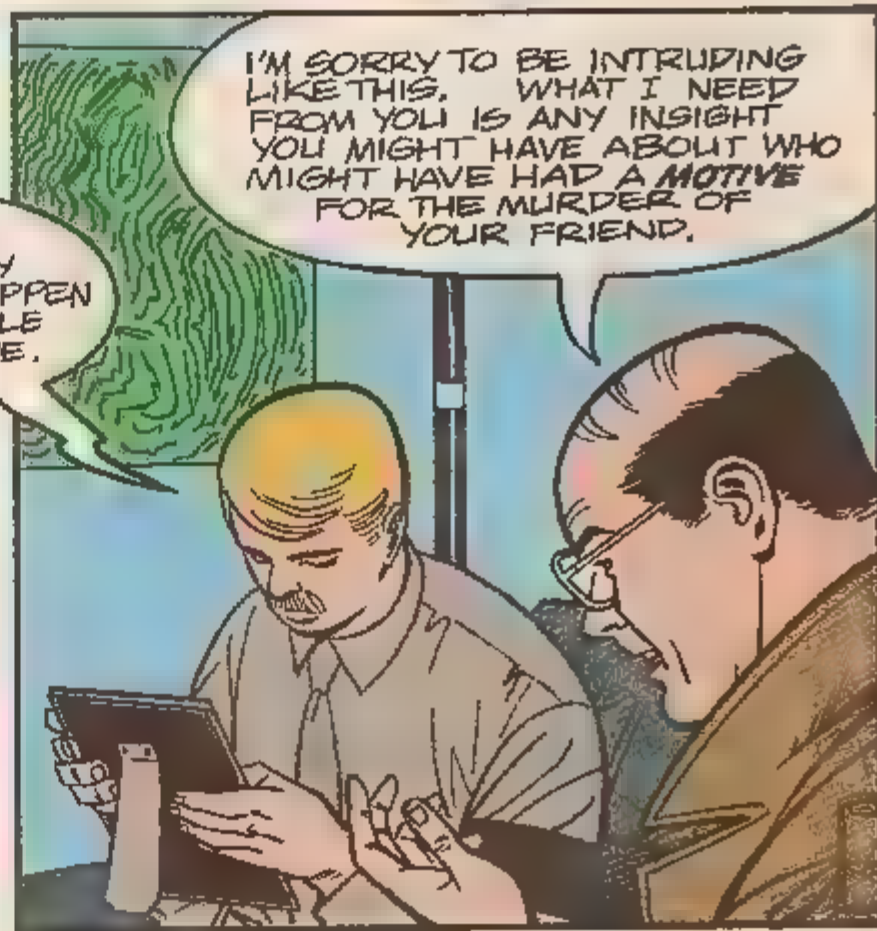
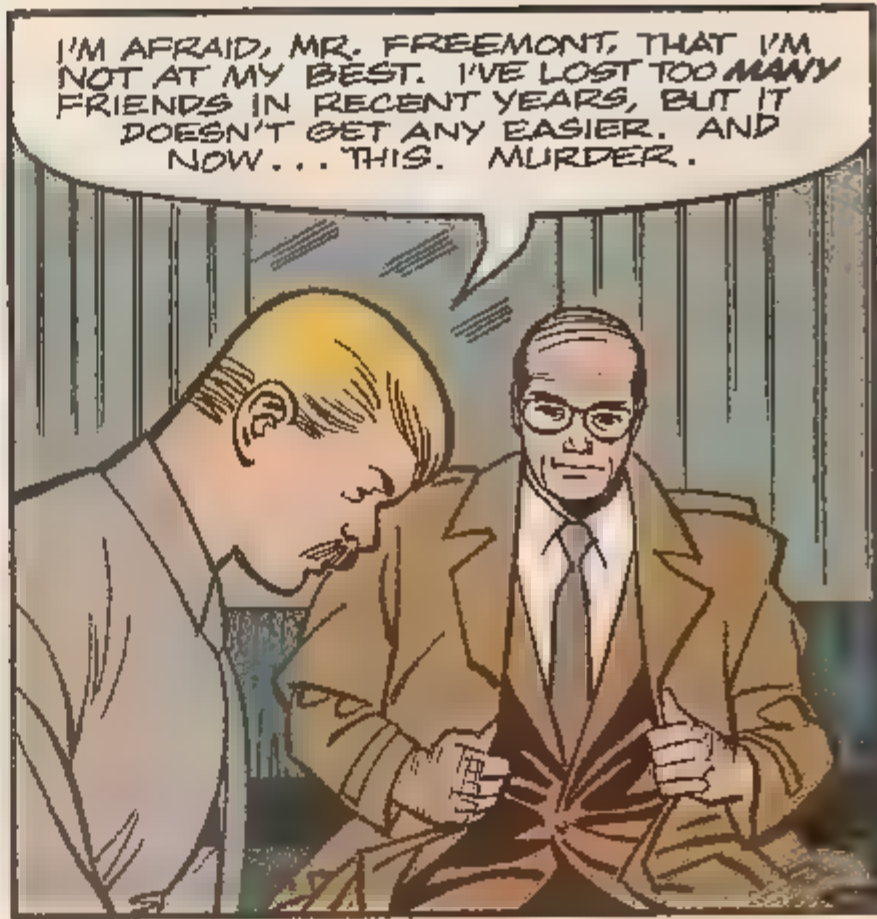
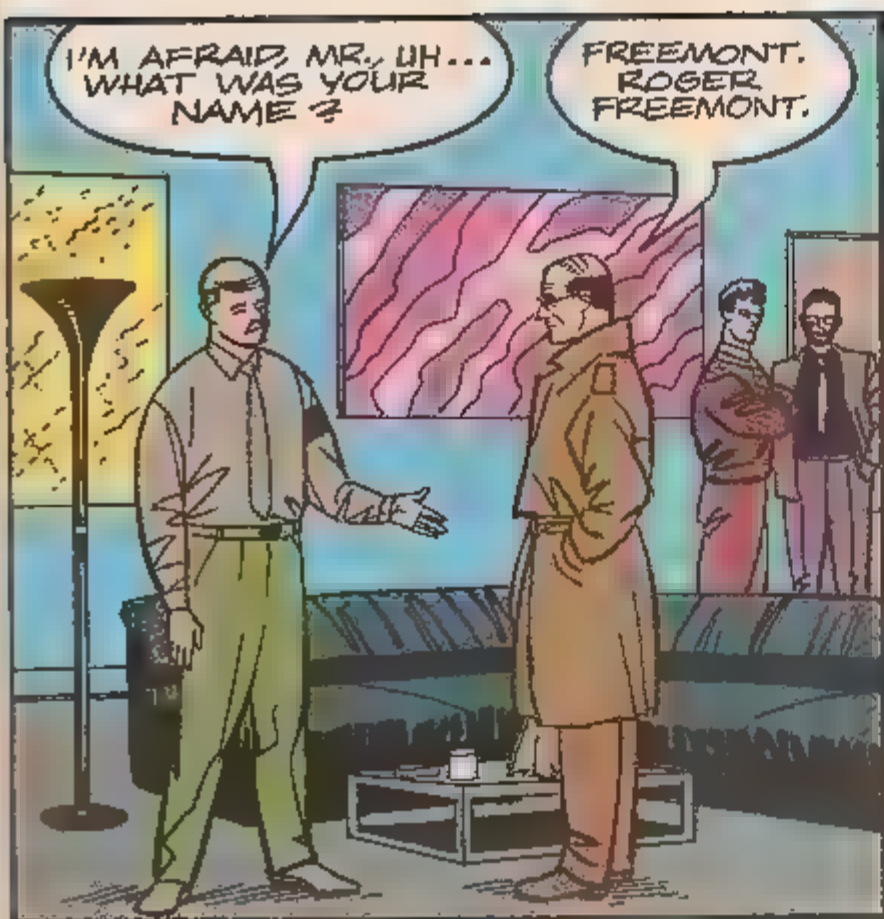
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ALEX'S KILLER?

YES I AM.



I'LL TALK TO YOU.





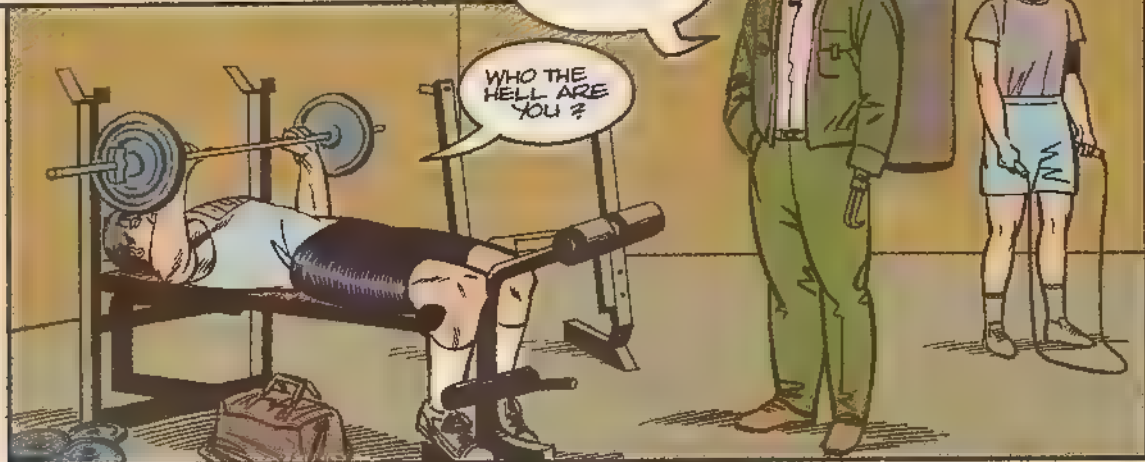


"MR. THOMPSON, IS THERE ANYONE IN PARTICULAR YOU SUSPECT...?"

"MR. FREEMONT, I CAN GIVE YOU QUITE A LIST OF SUSPECTS."

MARK  
RULE  
SORRY TO  
INTERRUPT  
YOUR  
WORK-OUT...

WHO THE  
HELL ARE  
YOU?



DAN GREEN, I'M A  
DETECTIVE WORKING  
ON THE GRAIT  
HOMICIDE...

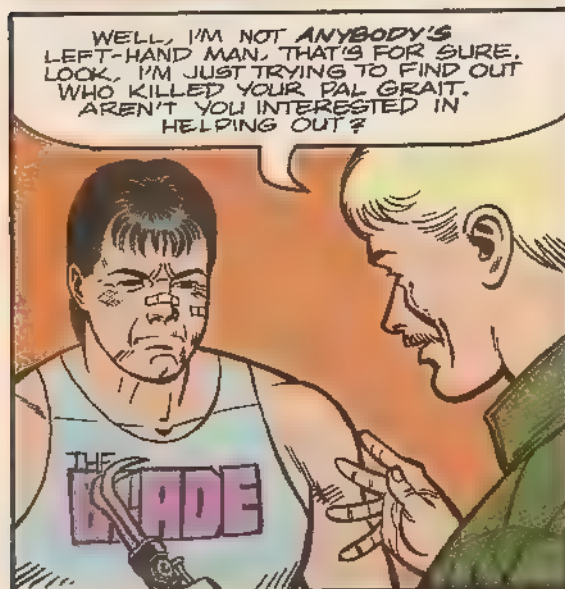
YOU'RE  
NO  
COP.



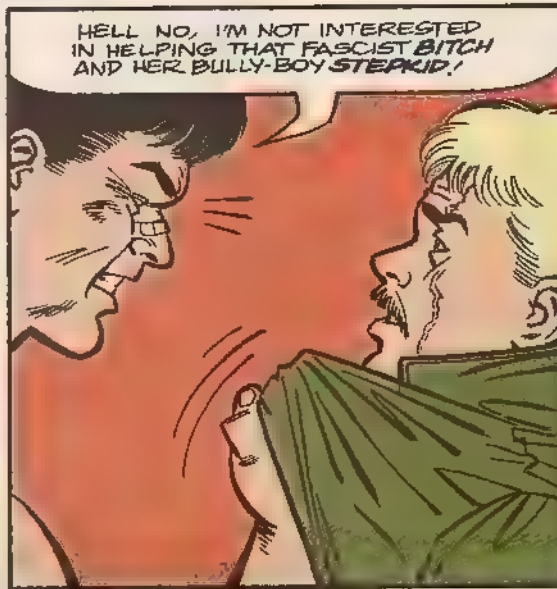
I RECOGNIZE YOU  
FROM THE PAPERS.  
YOU'RE HER  
RIGHT-HAND MAN!



WELL, I'M NOT ANYBODY'S  
LEFT-HAND MAN, THAT'S FOR SURE.  
LOOK, I'M JUST TRYING TO FIND OUT  
WHO KILLED YOUR PAL GRAIT.  
AREN'T YOU INTERESTED IN  
HELPING OUT?



HELL NO, I'M NOT INTERESTED  
IN HELPING THAT FASCIST BITCH  
AND HER BULLY-BOY STEPKID!





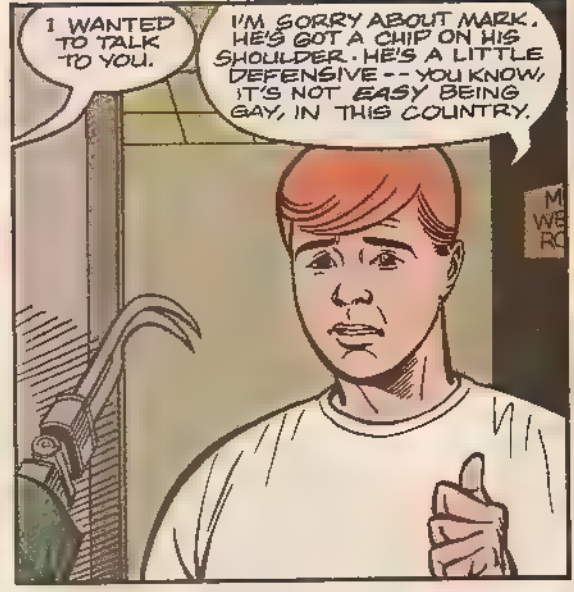






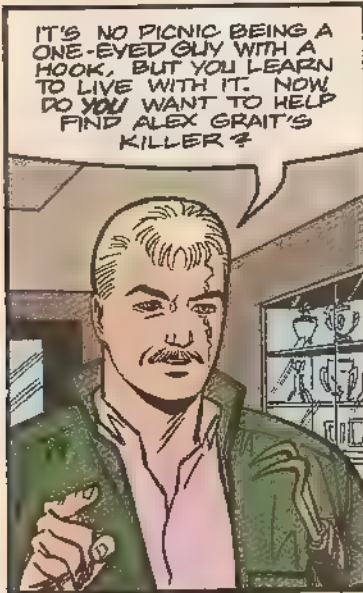
EXCUSE ME...

YOU'RE STEVE SIMMONS, AREN'T YOU?

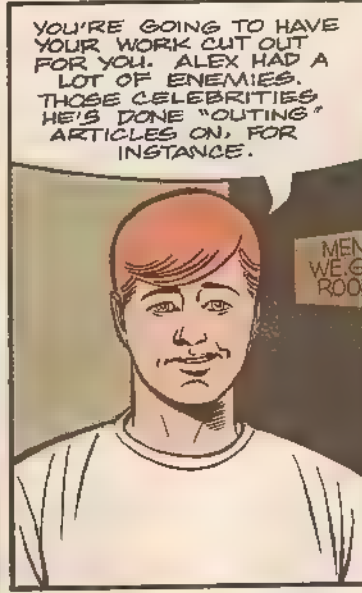


I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU.

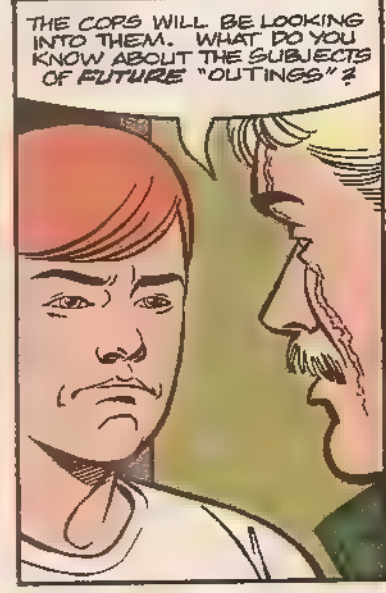
I'M SORRY ABOUT MARK. HE'S GOT A CHIP ON HIS SHOULDER. HE'S A LITTLE DEFENSIVE -- YOU KNOW, IT'S NOT EASY BEING GAY, IN THIS COUNTRY.



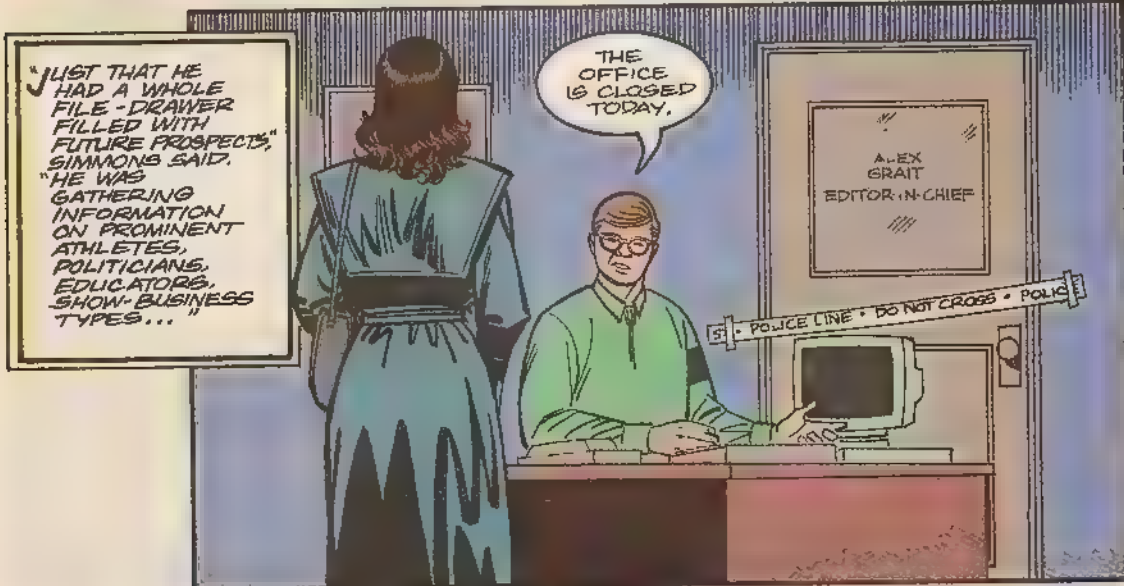
IT'S NO PICNIC BEING A ONE-EYED GUY WITH A HOOK, BUT YOU LEARN TO LIVE WITH IT. NOW DO YOU WANT TO HELP FIND ALEX GRAIT'S KILLER?



YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE YOUR WORK CUT OUT FOR YOU. ALEX HAD A LOT OF ENEMIES. THOSE CELEBRITIES HE'S DONE "OUTING" ARTICLES ON, FOR INSTANCE.



THE COPS WILL BE LOOKING INTO THEM. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE SUBJECTS OF FUTURE "OUTINGS"?



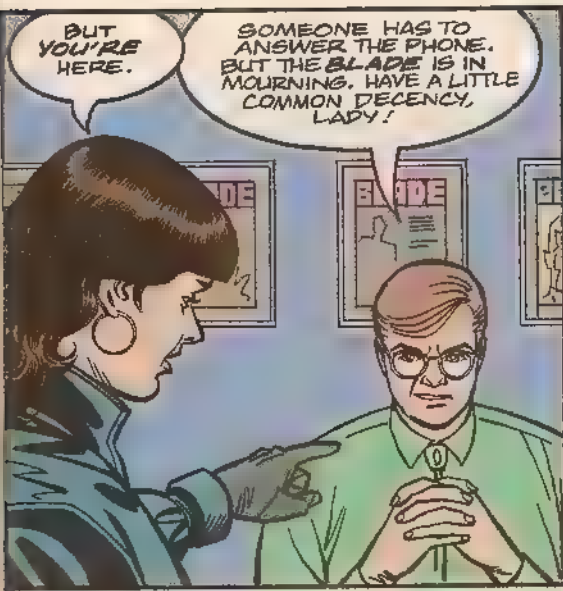
"JUST THAT HE HAD A WHOLE FILE-DRAWER FILLED WITH FUTURE PROSPECTS," SIMMONS SAID. "HE WAS GATHERING INFORMATION ON PROMINENT ATHLETES, POLITICIANS, EDUCATORS, SHOW-BUSINESS TYPES..."

THE OFFICE IS CLOSED TODAY.

ALEX GRAIT  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

1ST • POLICE LINE • DO NOT CROSS • POLICE





BUT YOU'RE HERE.

SOMEONE HAS TO ANSWER THE PHONE. BUT THE BLADE IS IN MOURNING. HAVE A LITTLE COMMON DECENCY, LADY!

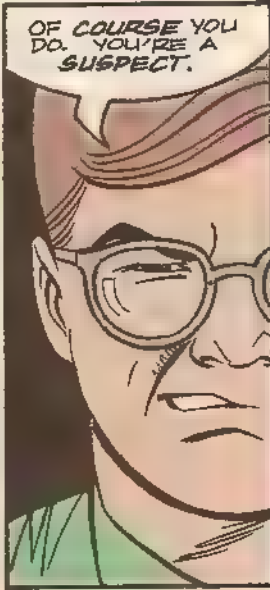


"COMMON DECENCY" ISN'T SOMETHING THE BLADE SPECIALIZES IN... BUT "OUTINGS" ARE.

GO AWAY.



I'M NOT HERE TO MAKE A SCENE. I WANT TO FIND ALEX GRAY'S KILLER.



OF COURSE YOU DO. YOU'RE A SUSPECT.

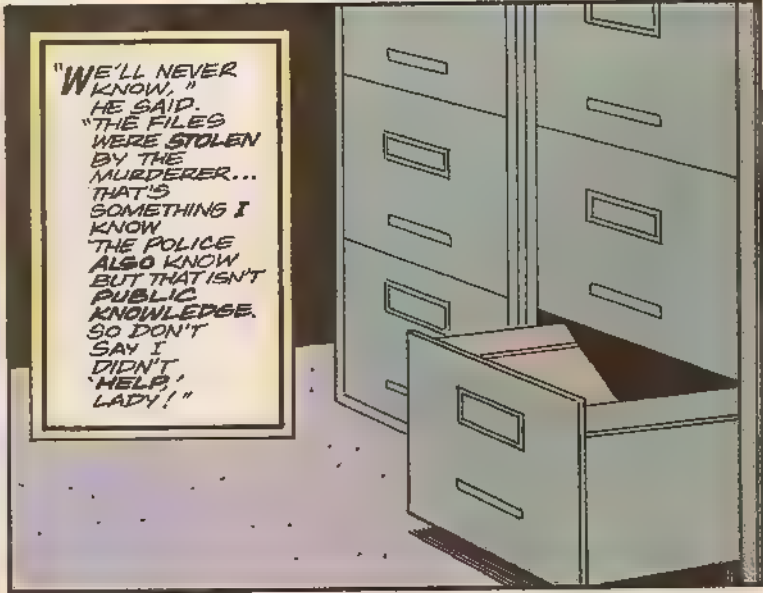


HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS A SUSPECT?

I KNOW YOU WERE THE SUBJECT OF AN UPCOMING "OUTING" ARTICLE...



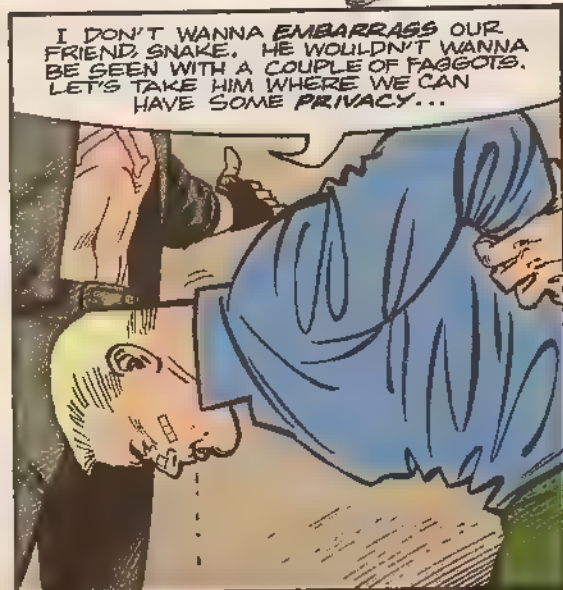
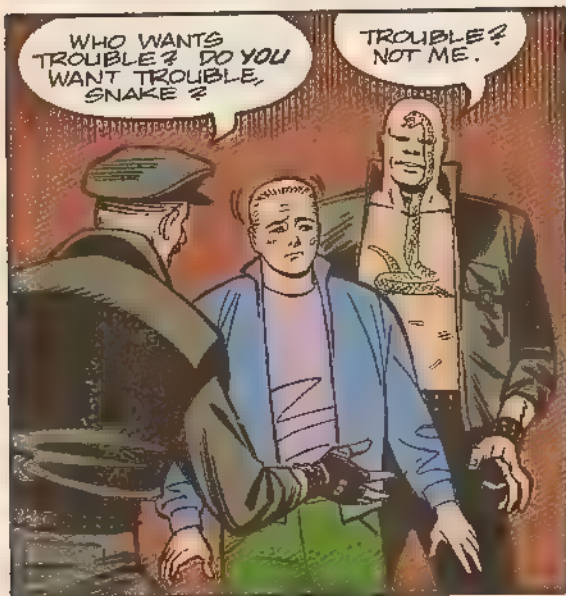
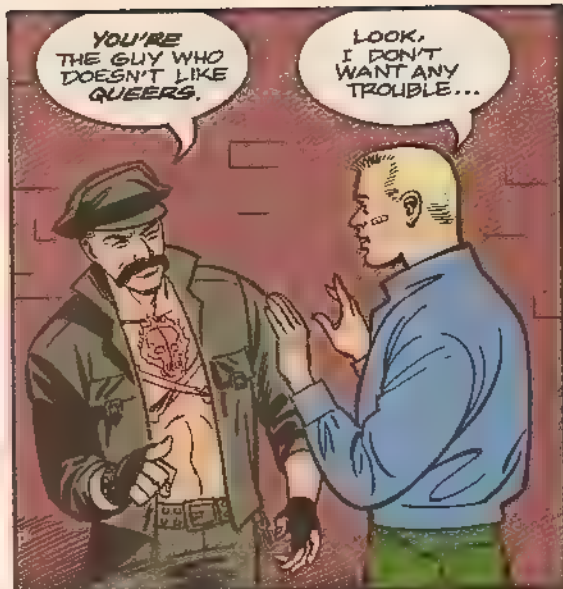
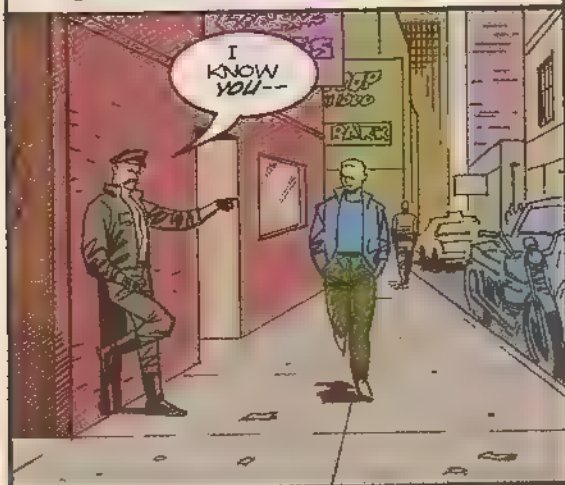
WHO ELSE WAS?



"WE'LL NEVER KNOW," HE SAID. "THE FILES WERE STOLEN BY THE MURDERER... THAT'S SOMETHING I KNOW. THE POLICE ALSO KNOW BUT THAT ISN'T PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE. SO DON'T SAY I DIDN'T 'HELP,' LADY!"

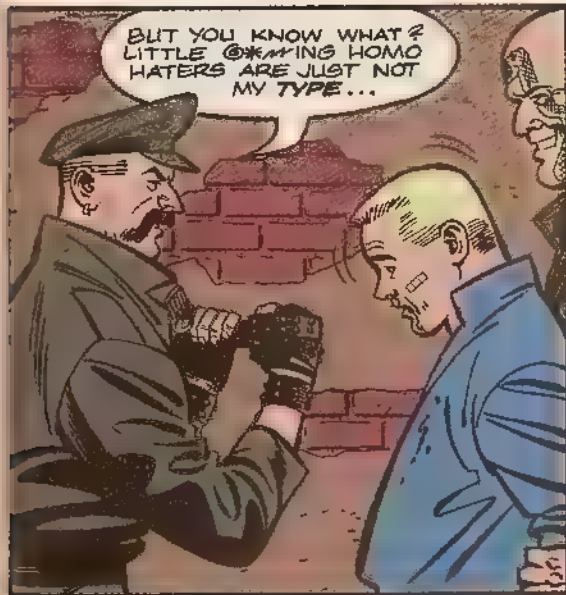
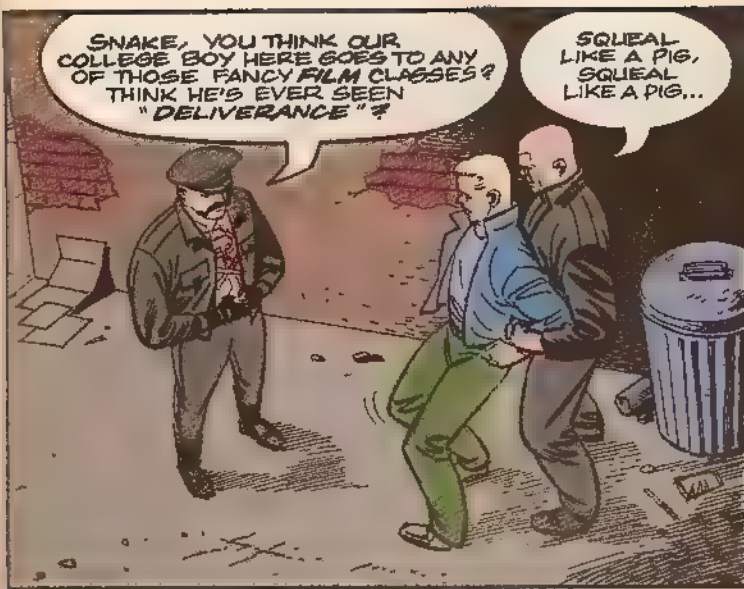


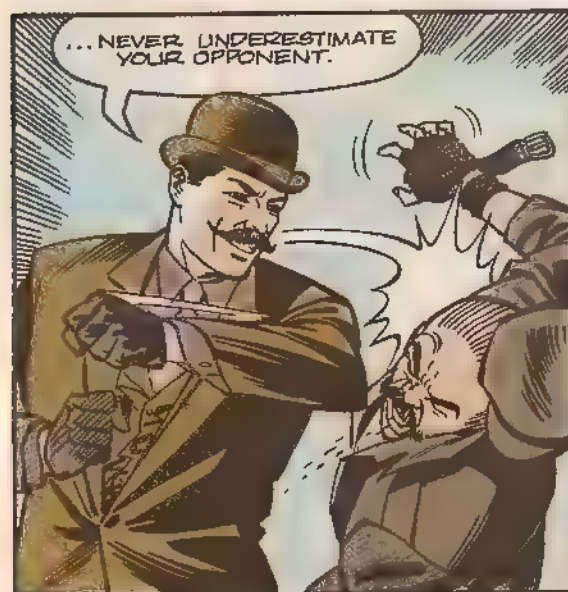
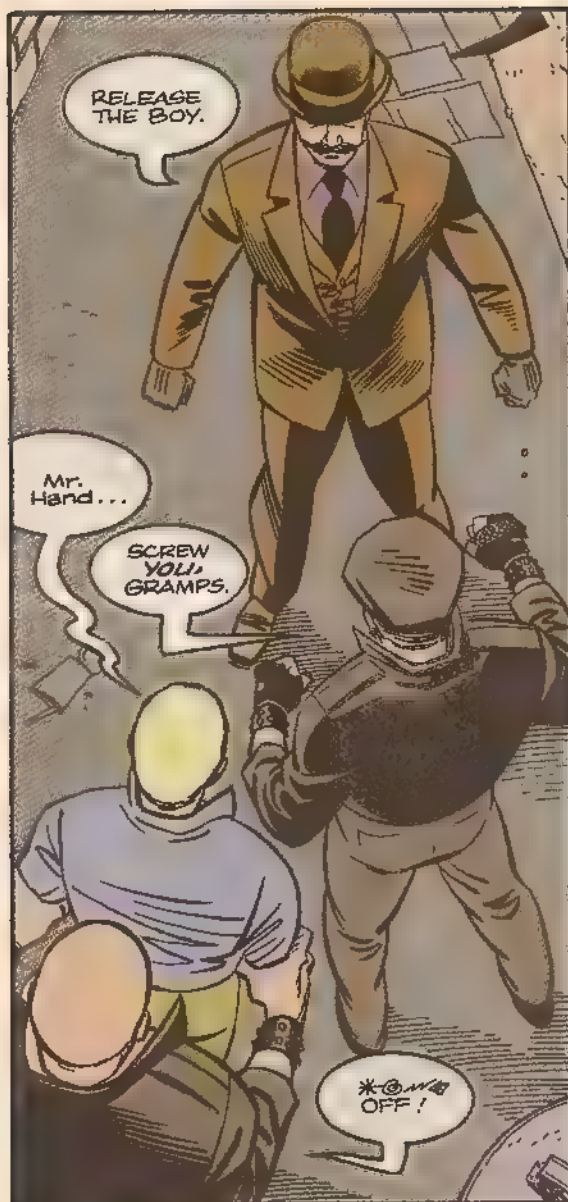
**M**S. TREE SAID I OUGHT TO KEEP A LOW PROFILE. I WAS TRYING. BUT WHEN I WENT OUT TO GRAB A BURGER AFTER MY LAST CLASS...



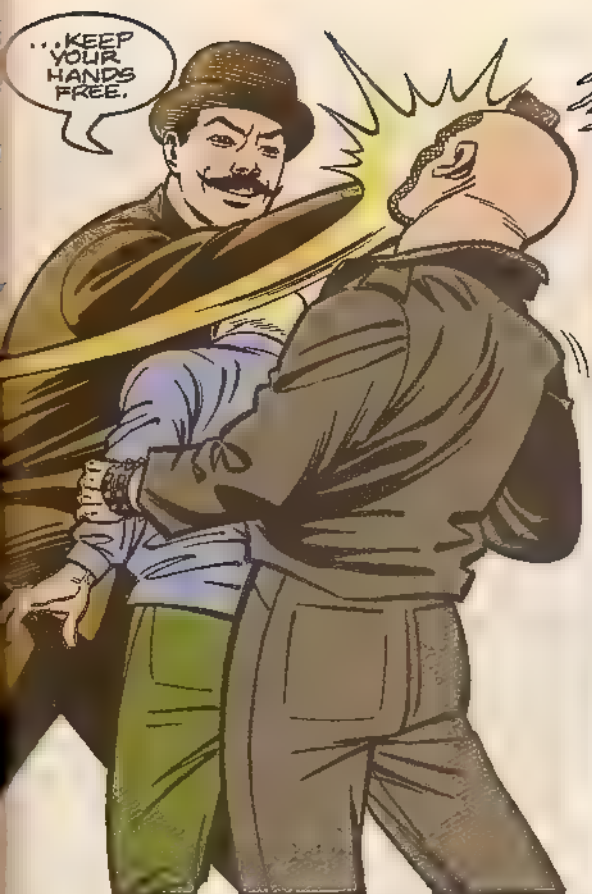
I DON'T WANNA EMBARRASS OUR FRIEND, SNAKE. HE WOULDN'T WANNA BE SEEN WITH A COUPLE OF FAGGOTS. LET'S TAKE HIM WHERE WE CAN HAVE SOME PRIVACY...

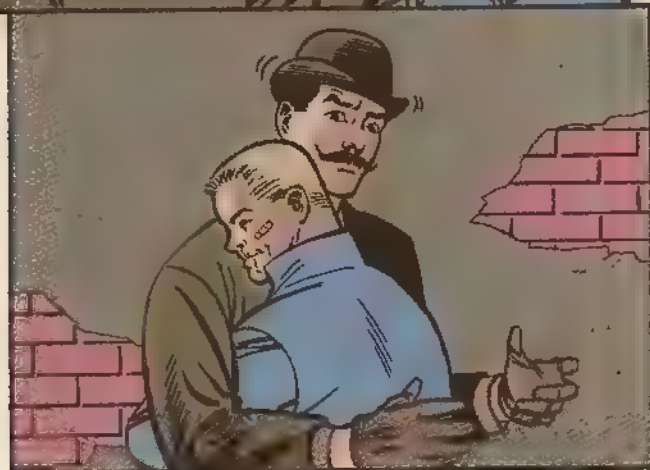
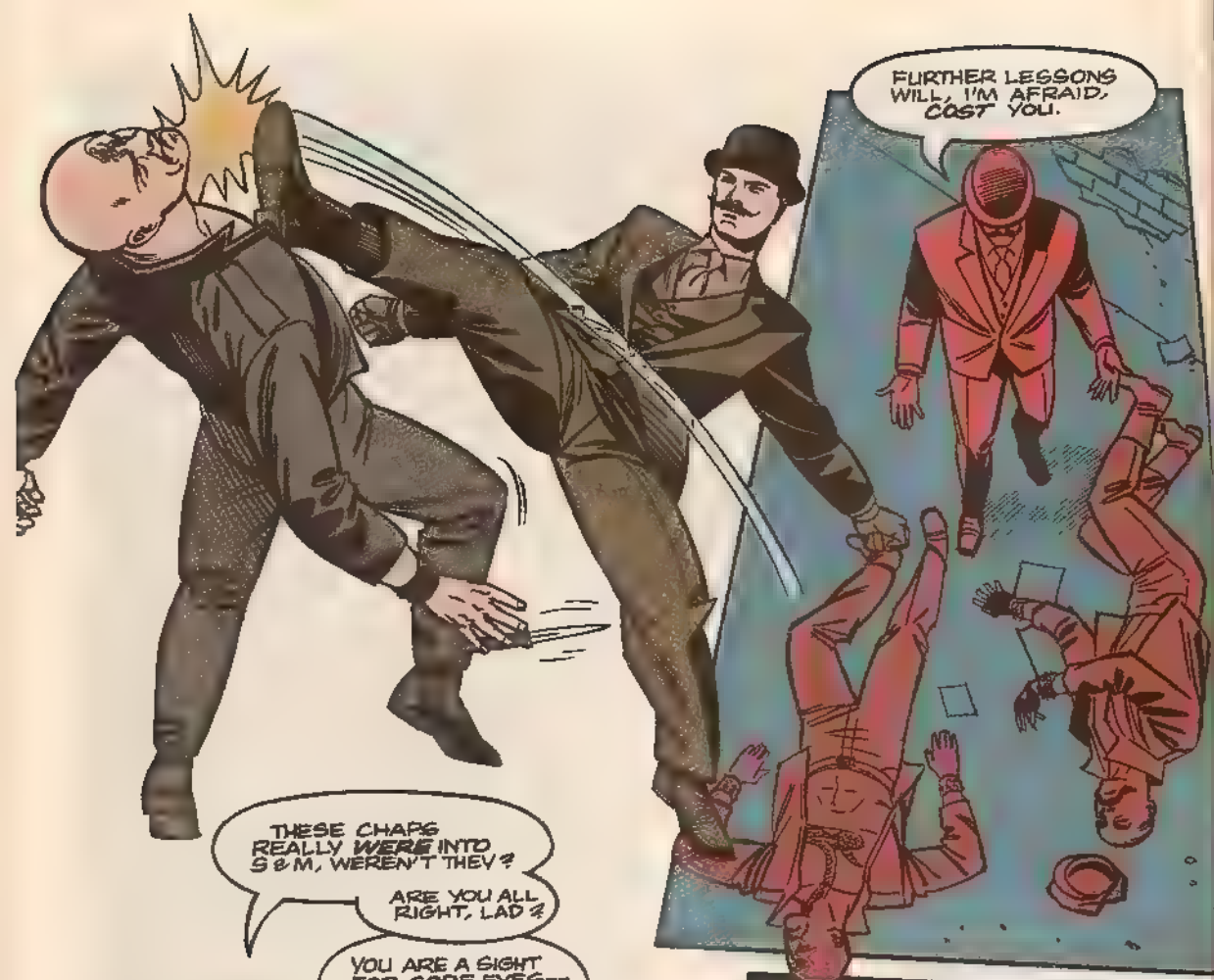














YOUR STEPMUM HIRED ME ON TO LOOK AFTER YOU. I'VE BEEN KEEPING AN EYE ON YOU -- FROM A DISTANCE -- NOT WANTING TO INVADE YOUR PRIVACY.

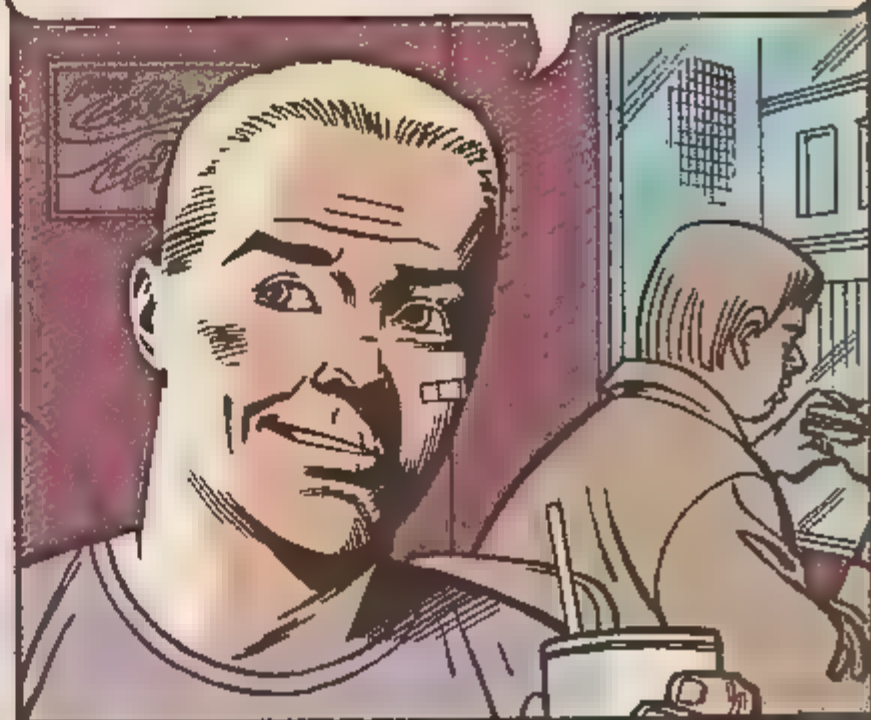


IF I'D BEEN MORE ABOVE-BOARD ABOUT IT, I WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INTERVENE SOONER, WITH THOSE BLACK-JACKET BLOKES.

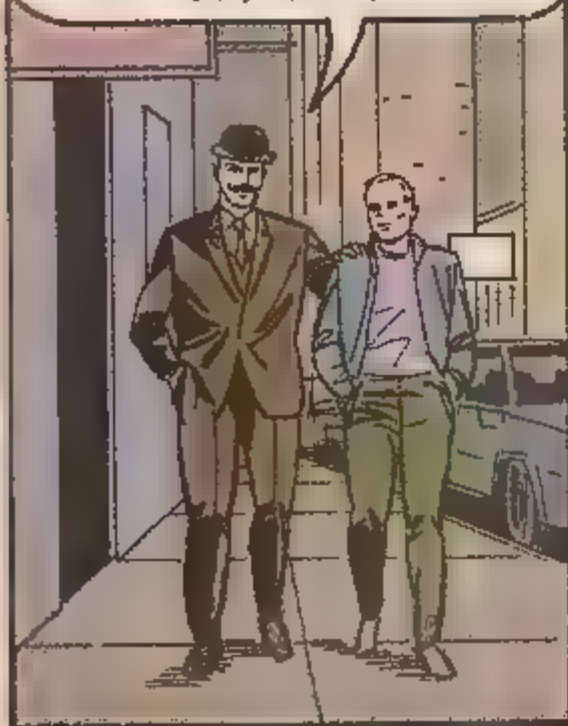
MY APOLOGIES.



THAT'S OKAY. AS BULLHEADED AS I'VE BEEN LATELY, I'D HAVE PROBABLY RESENTED IT, AND GIVEN YOU A BAD TIME. I'M A LITTLE OLD FOR A TUTOR, AND I OUGHT TO BE MAN ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

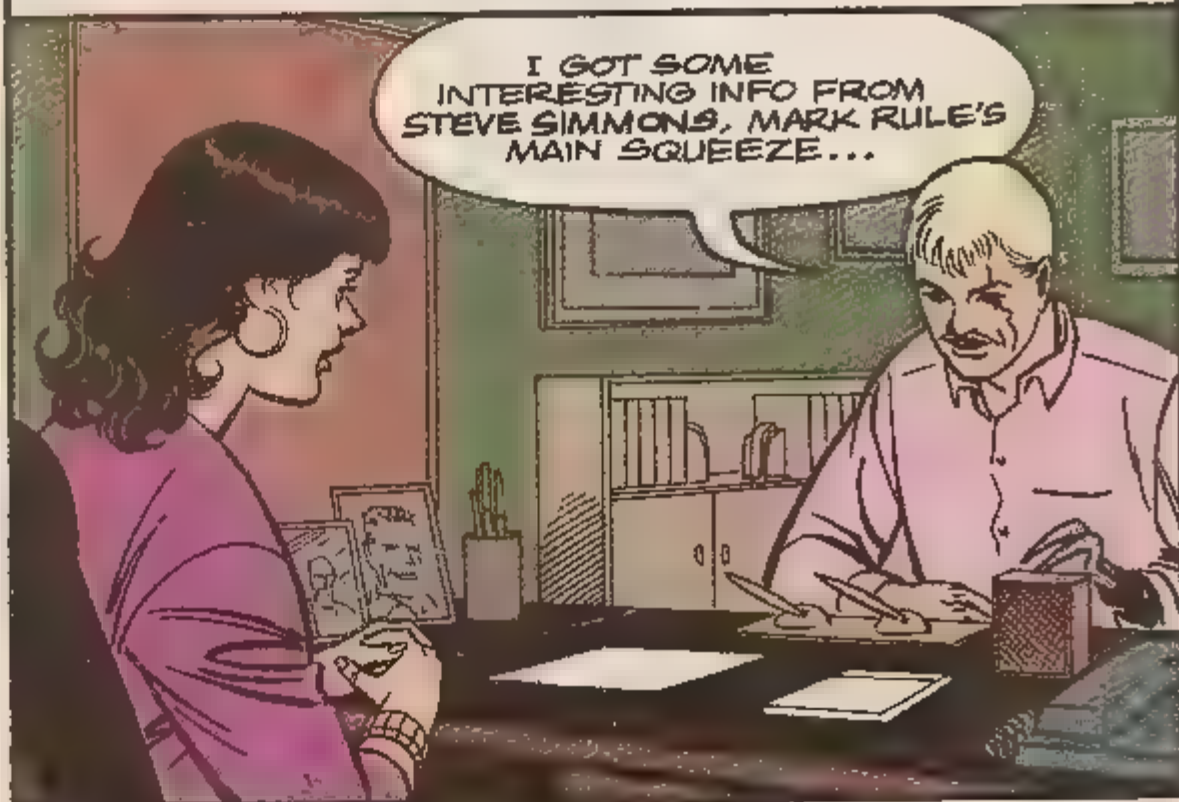


TO PARAPHRASE SOME FELLOW COUNTRYMEN OF MINE, WE ALL GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS... EH, LAD?



"YOU'RE RIGHT, MR. HAND. MAYBE IT'S TIME I OWNED UP TO THE FACT THAT MY STEPMOTHER REALLY IS ON MY SIDE."

I GOT SOME INTERESTING INFO FROM STEVE SIMMONS, MARK RULE'S MAIN SQUEEZE...



IT WAS LONG AFTER BUSINESS HOURS; BUT WE'D AGREED TO MEET AT THE OFFICE, AFTER WE'D EACH GONE OUT TO INTERVIEW OUR RESPECTIVE LEADS. ROGER WASN'T BACK YET.

ALEXANDER GRAIT WASN'T AS YOUNG AS HE LOOKED. HE WAS PUSHING THIRTY.

BUT HE WAS A COLLEGE STUDENT, TILL JUST A FEW YEARS AGO.

APPARENTLY HE WENT TO GRAD SCHOOL YEARS AFTER HIS UNDERGRADUATE WORK.

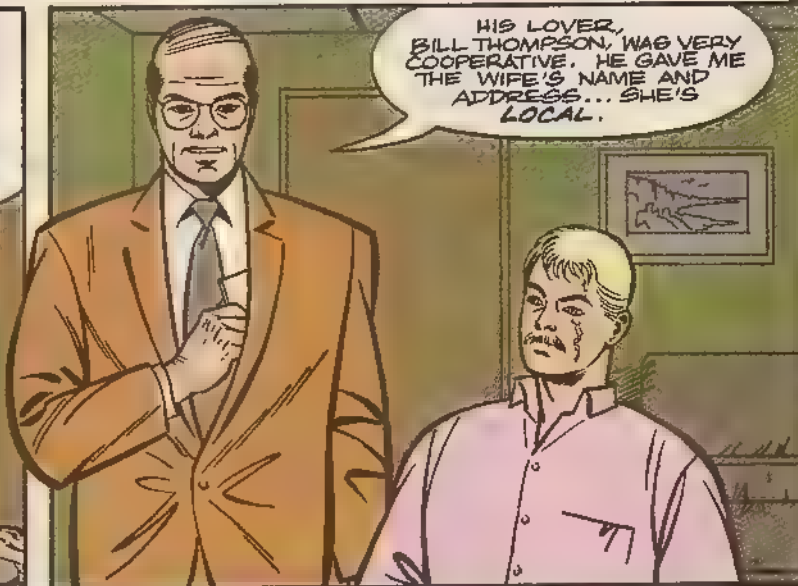
SIMMONS THOUGHT GRAIT MAY HAVE BEEN LIVING A STRAIGHT LIFE, OUT IN THE STRAIGHT WORLD... AND WENT BACK TO COLLEGE, AND INTO THE ARTS, SPECIFICALLY TO ADOPT AN OPENLY GAY LIFE-STYLE.



DAN'S RIGHT. GRAIT WAS THIRTY-ONE YEARS OLD. AND NOT ONLY DID HE LIVE A STRAIGHT LIFE FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, HE WAS MARRIED. A FATHER OF TWO.



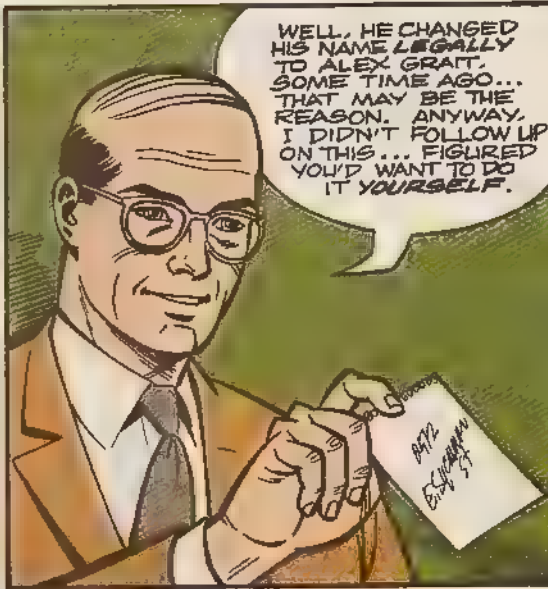
HIS LOVER, BILL THOMPSON, WAS VERY COOPERATIVE. HE GAVE ME THE WIFE'S NAME AND ADDRESS... SHE'S LOCAL.



I FIGURED "ALEXANDER GRAIT" WAS A PHONY NAME, BUT NEITHER THE PAPERS OR THE COPS CRACKED IT-- THAT WE KNOW OF, ANYWAY.



WELL, HE CHANGED HIS NAME LEGALLY TO ALEX GRAIT, SOME TIME AGO... THAT MAY BE THE REASON. ANYWAY, I DIDN'T FOLLOW UP ON THIS... FIGURED YOU'D WANT TO DO IT YOURSELF.





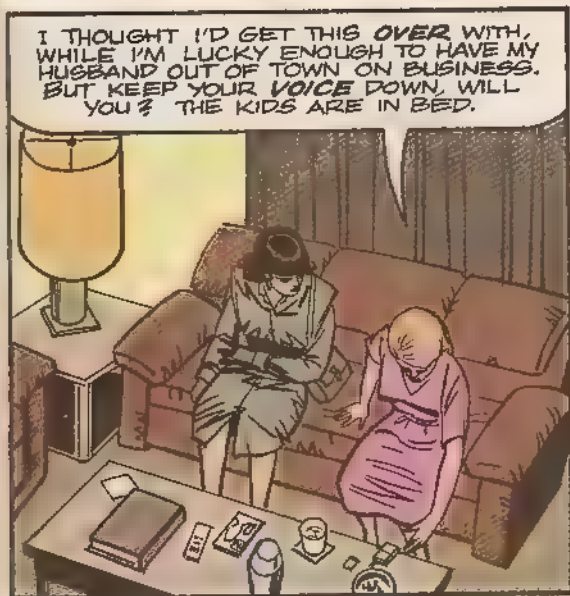


THANK YOU FOR SEEING ME AT SUCH SHORT NOTICE, MRS. PRIOR, AND AT THIS HOUR...

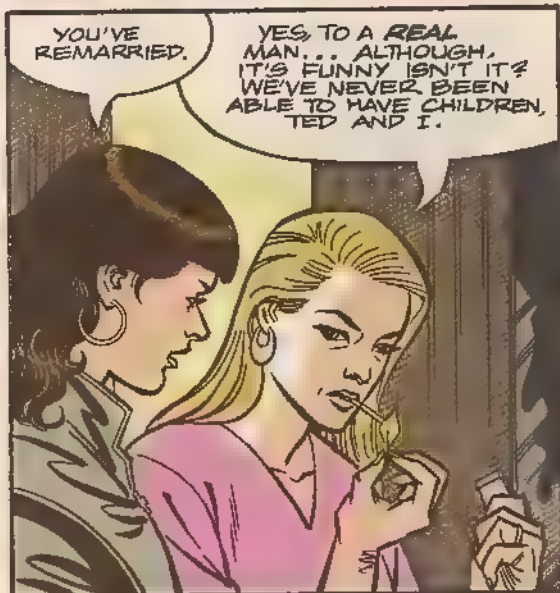
DID I HAVE A CHOICE?



I'VE HEARD OF YOU, MS. TREE. READ OF YOU. I KNOW HOW PERSISTENT YOU CAN BE.

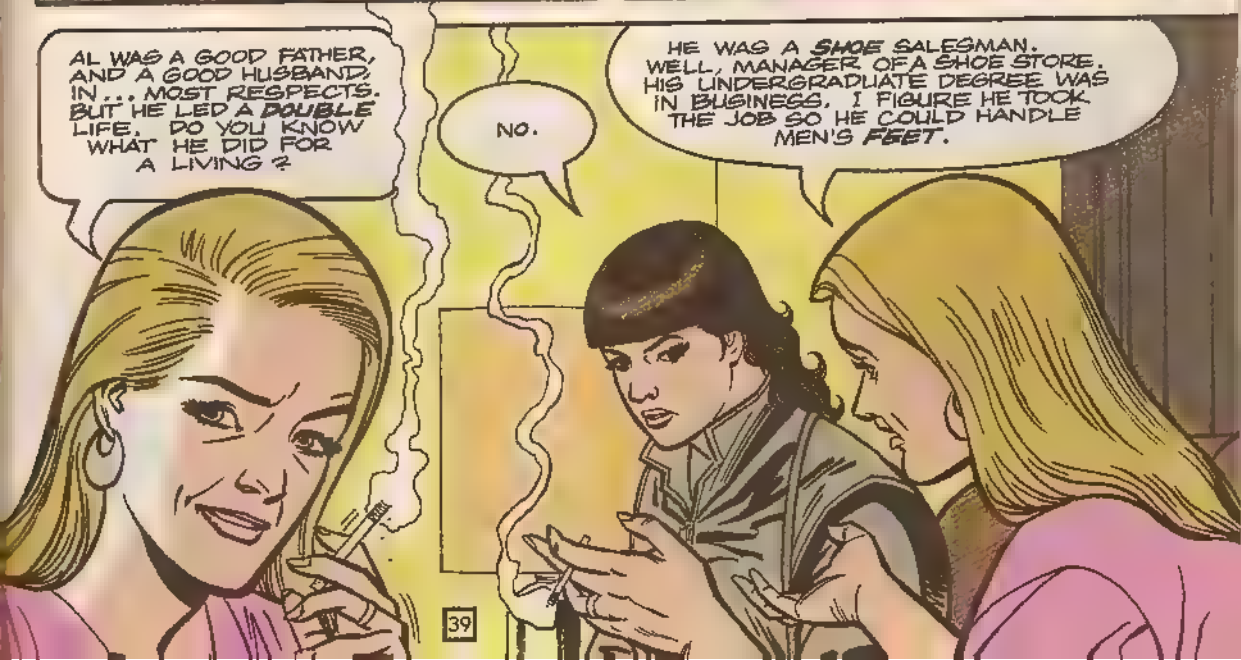


I THOUGHT I'D GET THIS OVER WITH, WHILE I'M LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE MY HUSBAND OUT OF TOWN ON BUSINESS. BUT KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN, WILL YOU? THE KIDS ARE IN BED.



YOU'VE REMARRIED.

YES, TO A REAL MAN... ALTHOUGH, IT'S FUNNY ISN'T IT? WE'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO HAVE CHILDREN, TED AND I.



AL WAS A GOOD FATHER, AND A GOOD HUSBAND, IN... MOST RESPECTS. BUT HE LED A DOUBLE LIFE. DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID FOR A LIVING?

NO.

HE WAS A SHOE SALESMAN. WELL, MANAGER OF A SHOE STORE. HIS UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE WAS IN BUSINESS. I FIGURE HE TOOK THE JOB SO HE COULD HANDLE MEN'S FEET.

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, MRS. PRYOR, YOU'RE STILL CARRYING A LOT OF BITTERNESS.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING. AT LEAST MY BITTERNESS DOESN'T MANIFEST ITSELF THROUGH CARNAGE, LIKE SOME PEOPLE I'VE READ ABOUT.

MAYBE I SHOULD COME BACK ANOTHER TIME.

NO! THIS IS YOUR ONLY ACCESS TO ME, LADY! YOU ASK YOUR QUESTIONS, AND I'LL ANSWER, AND YOU CAN JUST GET THE HELL OUT OF MY LIFE.

THE FUNNY THING IS... SO FUNNY... I LOVED HIM. I STILL LOVE HIM. I LOVED HIM SINCE COLLEGE. SUCH A PRETTY MAN, SO PRETTY.

TO THIS DAY I BLAME THAT SON OF A BITCH AT THE COLLEGE.

PARDON?

I DON'T THINK AL HAD EVER... DONE ANYTHING ABOUT THESE... FEELINGS HE HAD. TILL THAT BASTARD... HE WAS AL'S STUDENT ADVISOR, YOU KNOW? I'M SURE THAT'S WHEN IT STARTED.

WHAT WAS HIS NAME?



I MADE A FEW CALLS ON MY CAR PHONE. ONE OF THEM BROUGHT NO ANSWER. THE OTHER DID...

YOUR HUSBAND'S STILL AT THE COLLEGE?  
THANK YOU...

BUT HE WASN'T AT THE COLLEGE --  
AT LEAST NOT AT HIS OFFICE. I'D  
JUST TRIED THERE. I PUNCHED IN  
MARK RULE'S NUMBER...

HE'S NOT HERE, MS. TREE.  
HE SAID HE WAS MEETING  
SOMEBODY OVER AT THE  
STUDENT UNION -- AT THE  
WORK-OUT ROOM. I  
THINK IT WAS SOMETHING  
TO DO WITH A **BLADE**  
STORY.

THE WORK-OUT ROOM AT THE  
STUDENT UNION WAS LOCKED,  
BUT THERE WAS LIGHT COMING  
FROM UNDER THE DOOR.

EXCUSE ME, MA'AM --  
THAT'S FOR STUDENTS  
ONLY... MALE  
STUDENTS ONLY --

AND BESIDES IT'S AFTER  
HOURS. WE CLOSED UP  
HALF AN HOUR AGO.

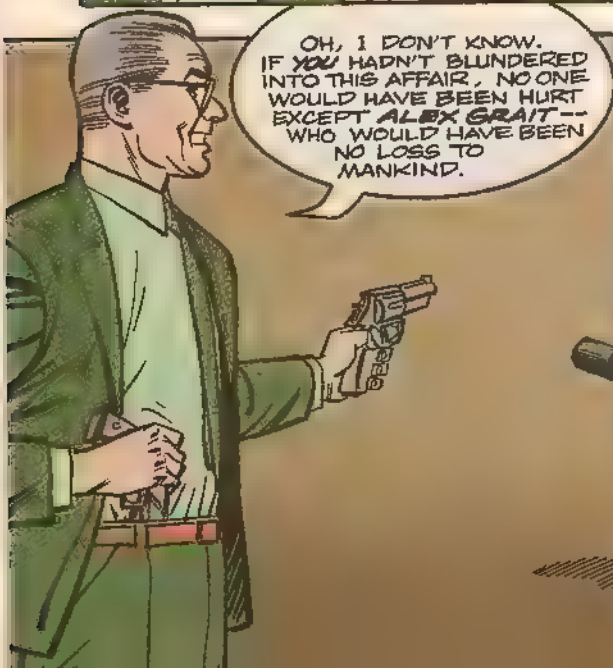
UNLOCK THAT DOOR --  
QUIETLY -- AND THEN GO  
AWAY. GO CALL THE POLICE  
OR SOMETHING...

MEN'S  
WEIGHT  
ROOM

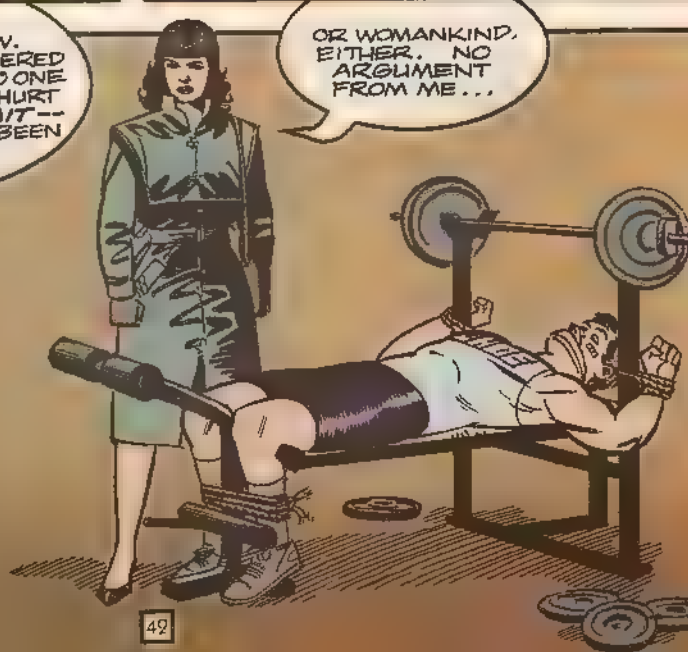


I'M AFRAID I  
HEARD YOU OUT THERE,  
MS. TREE. YOU'RE **NOT**  
VERY SUBTLE.

**SUBTLETY**  
ISN'T MY LONG SUIT.  
BUT NEITHER IS IT  
YOURS, DEAN  
CALVERT.

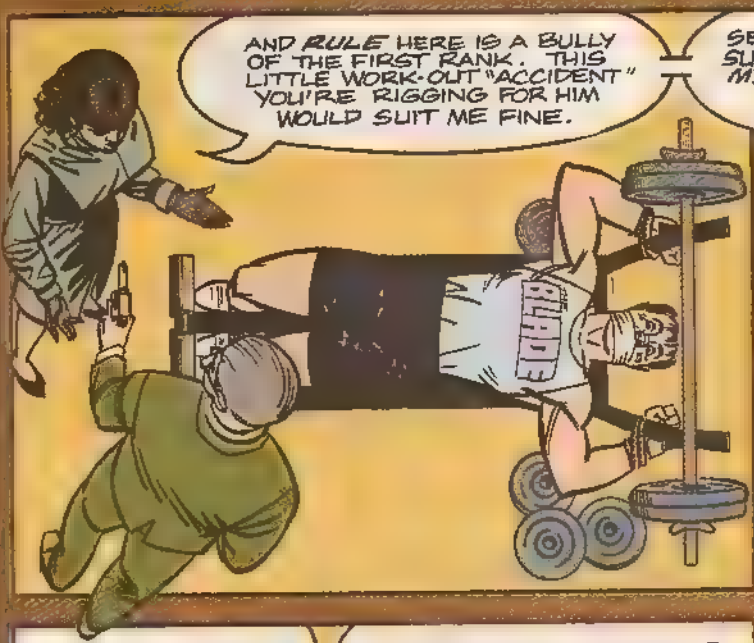


OH, I DON'T KNOW.  
IF **YOU** HADN'T BLUNDERED  
INTO THIS AFFAIR, NO ONE  
WOULD HAVE BEEN HURT  
EXCEPT **ALEX GRAY**--  
WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN  
NO LOSS TO  
MANKIND.



OR WOMANKIND,  
EITHER. NO  
ARGUMENT  
FROM ME...





AND **RULE** HERE IS A BULLY OF THE FIRST RANK. THIS LITTLE WORK-OUT "ACCIDENT" YOU'RE RIGGING FOR HIM WOULD SUIT ME FINE.

SEE, I WAS GOING TO BE THE SUBJECT OF AN "OUTING" ARTICLE MYSELF, DEAN CALVERT... I CAN SYMPATHIZE. EMPATHIZE, EVEN.

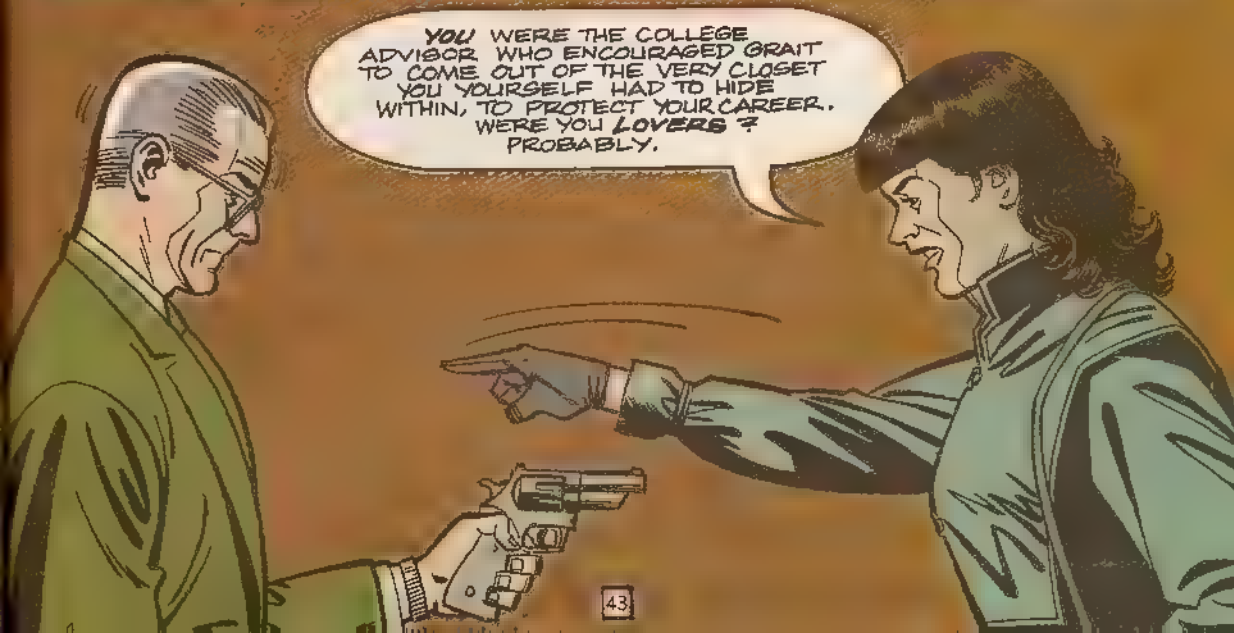
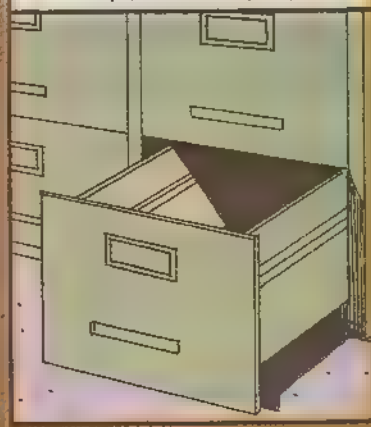


DID YOU ... DID YOU SEE THE MATERIAL IN GRAIT'S FILE ?

NO. BUT I CAN IMAGINE IT. I'M SURE YOU'VE **BURNED** THE MATERIAL IN THAT FILE... OF COURSE THERE COULD BE A DUPLICATE SOMEWHERE.

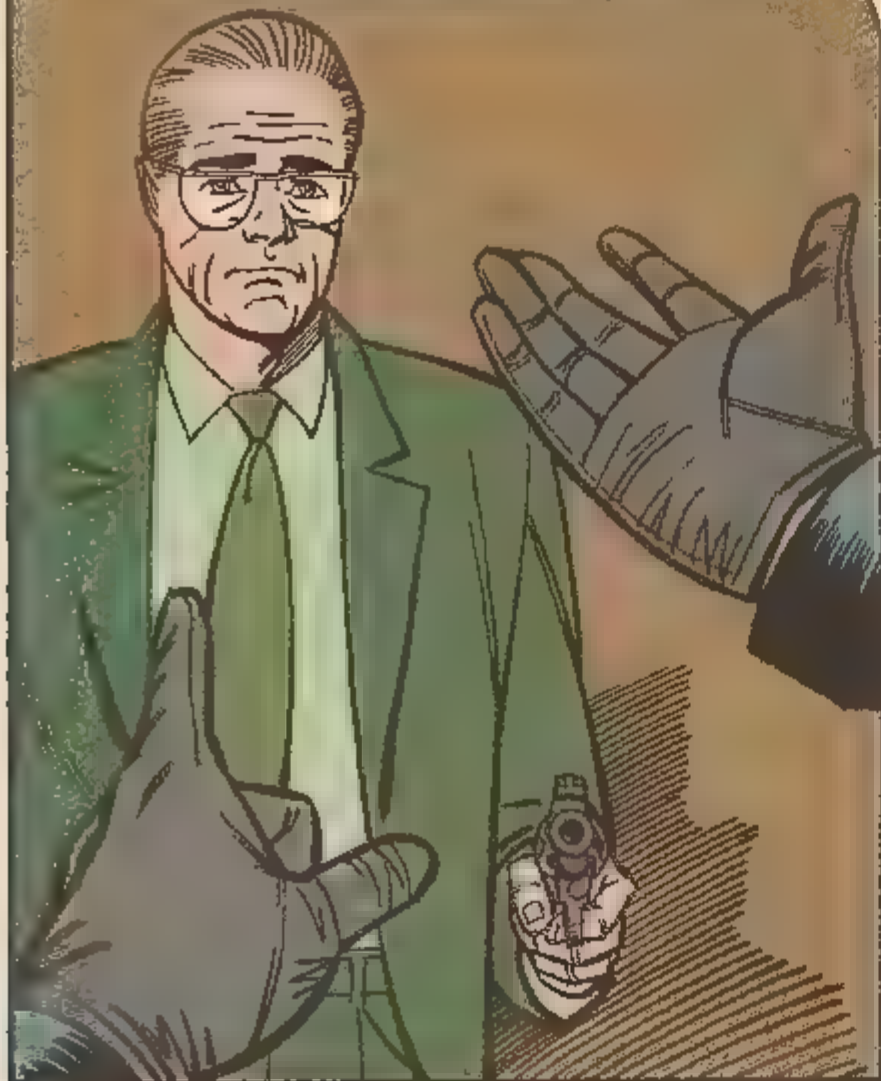


"MY INVESTIGATIVE STAFF AND I KNEW AT LEAST ONE EDUCATOR WAS IN THAT 'OUTING' FILE THAT WAS STOLEN THE NIGHT GRAIT WAS KILLED... THAT IS, THE NIGHT YOU KILLED GRAIT."

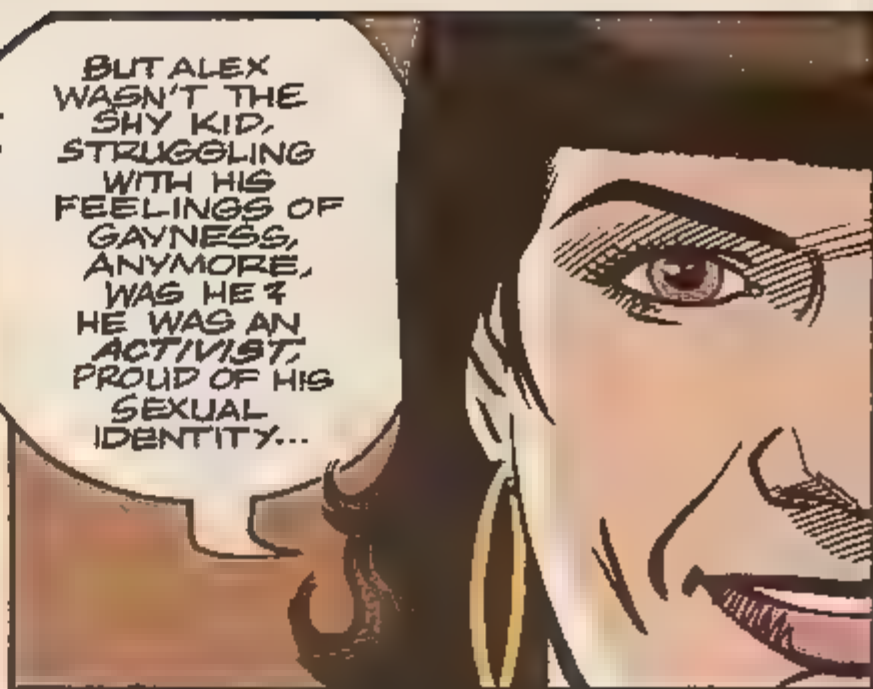


YOU WERE THE COLLEGE ADVISOR WHO ENCOURAGED GRAIT TO COME OUT OF THE VERY CLOSET YOU YOURSELF HAD TO HIDE WITHIN, TO PROTECT YOUR CAREER. WERE YOU **LOVERS** ? PROBABLY.

THEN WHEN HE LEFT THE STRAIGHT  
LIFE TO COME BACK TO GRAD SCHOOL  
AND THE ARTS, YOU HELPED HIM.  
YOU WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN PUTTING  
THE COLLEGE LITERARY MAGAZINE --  
THE PUBLICATION THAT BECAME  
THE BLADE -- IN HIS CONTROL.



BUT ALEX  
WASN'T THE  
SHY KID,  
STRUGGLING  
WITH HIS  
FEELINGS OF  
GAYNESS,  
ANYMORE,  
WAS HE?  
HE WAS AN  
ACTIVIST,  
PROUD OF HIS  
SEXUAL  
IDENTITY...



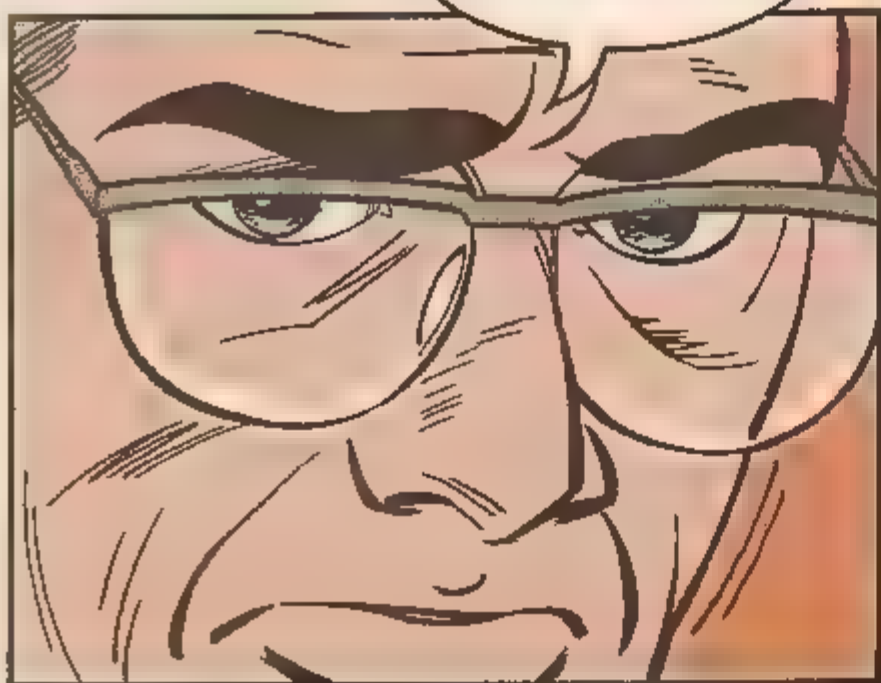
"AND HE FILLED THE MAGAZINE WITH  
EXPLICITLY GAY MATERIAL...  
ENDANGERING YOU AND YOUR  
CONSERVATIVE PERSONA. YOU SIDED  
WITH THE BLUE NOSES AND GOT HIM  
THROWN OFF CAMPUS."



YOU SHOULD  
HAVE KNOWN  
THAT BASTARD  
WOULD SEEK  
HIS REVENGE  
ON YOU.  
YOU MUST  
HAVE KNOWN  
IT WAS  
COMING.



HE'D...  
HE'D LOVED  
ME ONCE.  
I THOUGHT...  
I THOUGHT...



YOU THOUGHT WRONG, SO YOU  
KILLED HIM. NOT A BAD IDEA,  
REALLY -- BUT WHERE DOES IT  
END? NOT WITH ME, EITHER...  
YOU'LL HAVE TO KILL ME, TOO.





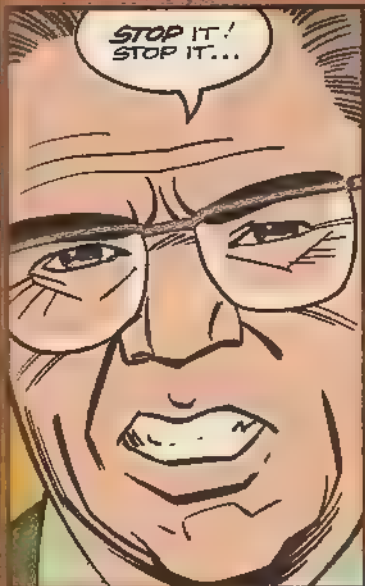
KEEP YOUR  
DISTANCE...

AND HOW CAN YOU BE SURE  
OTHERS ON THE STAFF DIDN'T  
SEE THAT MATERIAL? WHAT  
ABOUT RULE'S FRIEND  
STEVE SIMMONS?

MAYBE RULE CONFIDED  
IN HIM... AND MAYBE GRATT  
CONFIDED IN HIS CURRENT  
LOVER, BILL THOMPSON...  
LET'S SEE -- THAT'S AT  
LEAST FIVE MURDERS...



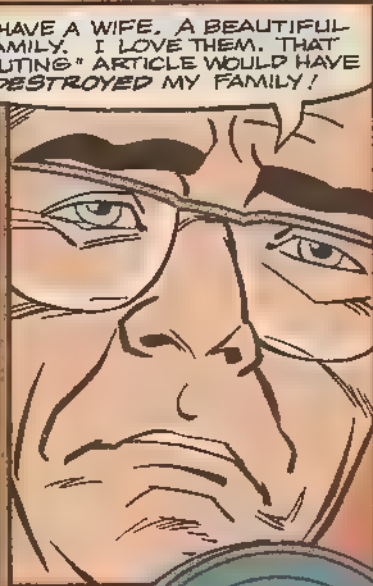
STOP IT!  
STOP IT...



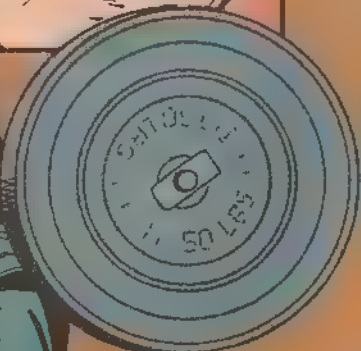
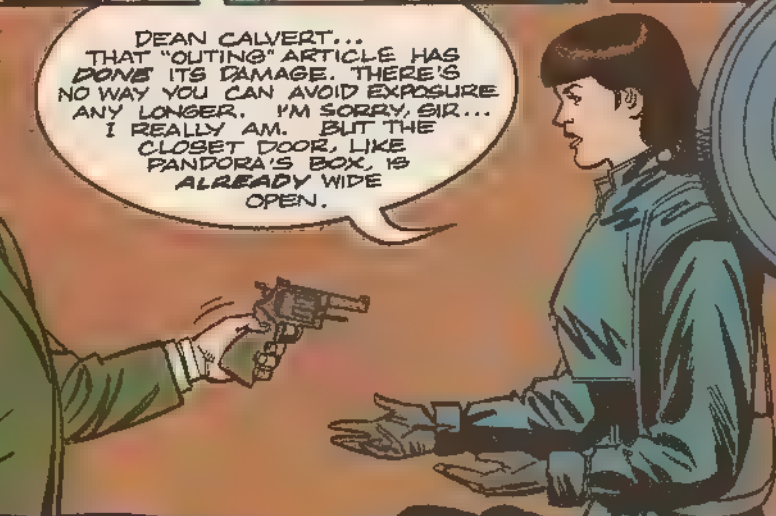
ONLY  
YOU CAN  
DO THAT.

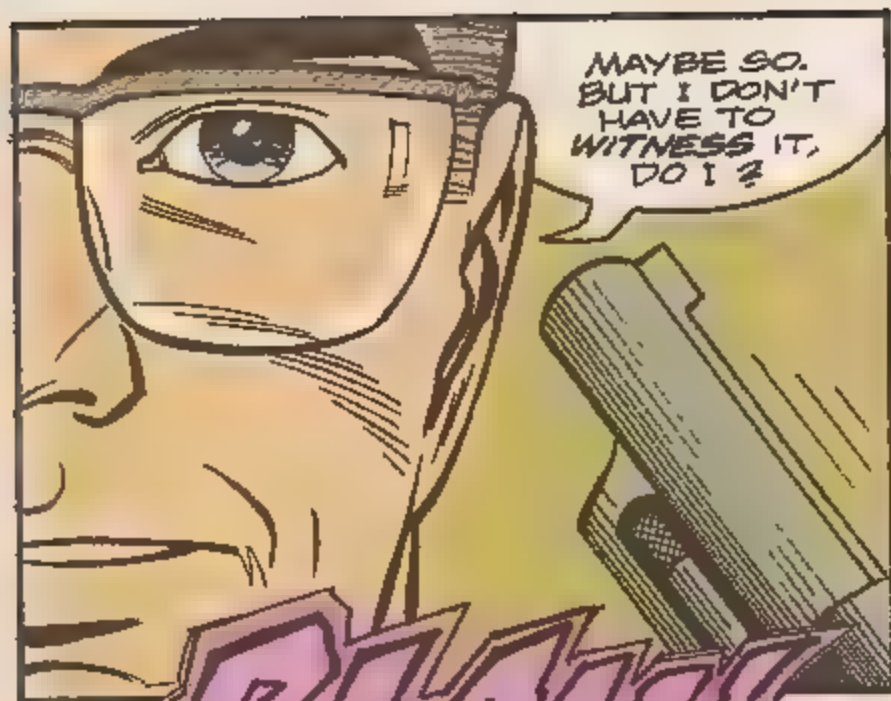


I HAVE A WIFE, A BEAUTIFUL  
FAMILY. I LOVE THEM. THAT  
"OUTING" ARTICLE WOULD HAVE  
DESTROYED MY FAMILY!



DEAN CALVERT...  
THAT "OUTING" ARTICLE HAS  
DONE ITS DAMAGE. THERE'S  
NO WAY YOU CAN AVOID EXPOSURE  
ANY LONGER. I'M SORRY, SIR...  
I REALLY AM. BUT THE  
CLOSET DOOR, LIKE  
PANDORA'S BOX, IS  
ALREADY WIDE  
OPEN.

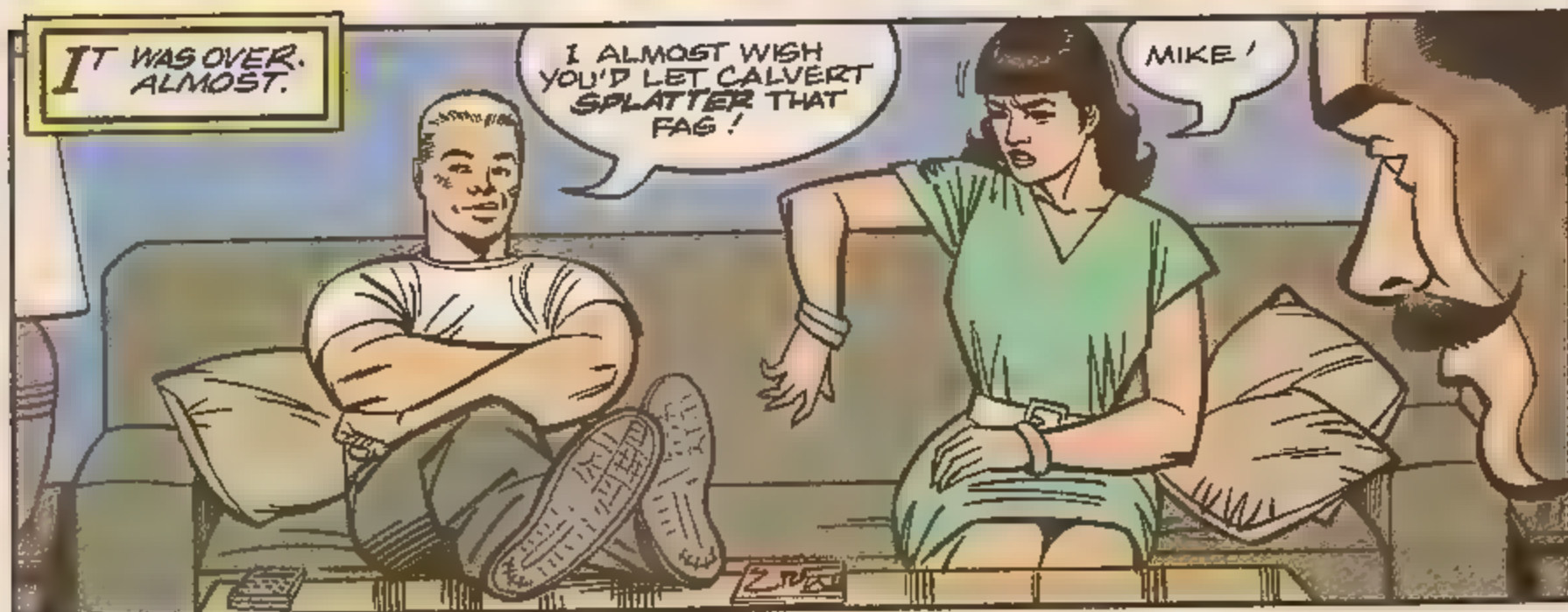




MAYBE SO.  
BUT I DON'T  
HAVE TO  
WITNESS IT,  
DO I ?



WHAT DO YOU  
KNOW, RULE ?  
THAT OLD EDUCATIONAL  
ADAGE IS TRUE...  
A MIND IS A  
TERRIBLE THING  
TO WASTE.



IT WAS OVER.  
ALMOST.

I ALMOST WISH  
YOU'D LET CALVERT  
SPLATTER THAT  
FAG !

MIKE !



I KNOW, I KNOW --  
I SHOULDN'T THINK BADLY  
OF "THOSE PEOPLE." WELL,  
IF I'VE LEARNED ANYTHING OUT  
OF THIS, IT'S THAT ALL QUEERS  
ARE A SICK, SORRY LOT !

PEOPLE IN GENERAL ARE  
A PRETTY SORRY LOT, MIKE,  
BUT IT'S NOT FAIR, IT'S  
NOT RIGHT...

M'UM ?



I THINK IT'S TIME I  
TOLD THE LAD SOMETHING  
ABOUT MYSELF. DON'T  
YOU, M'UM?



MICHAEL, MY BOY--  
I AM ONE OF THOSE  
PEOPLE.

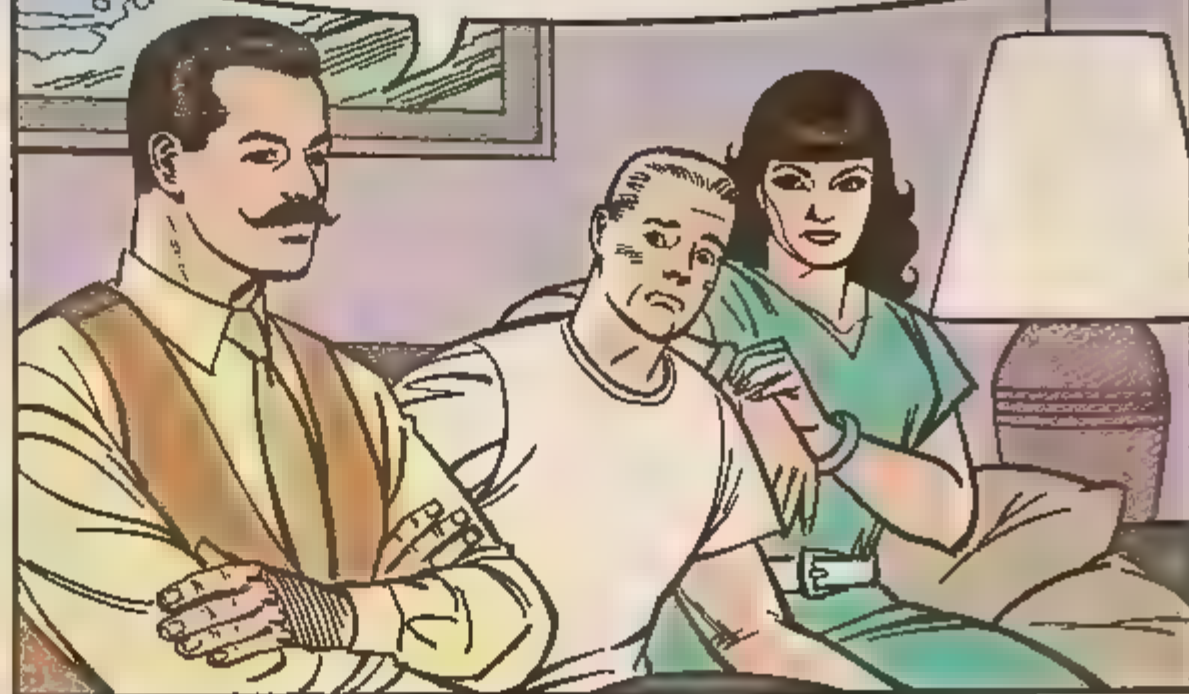
AH, DON'T  
KID AROUND! WHO  
ARE YOU TRYIN'  
TO KID?



I SELDOM KID. AND NOW  
IS CERTAINLY NOT ONE  
OF THOSE TIMES.



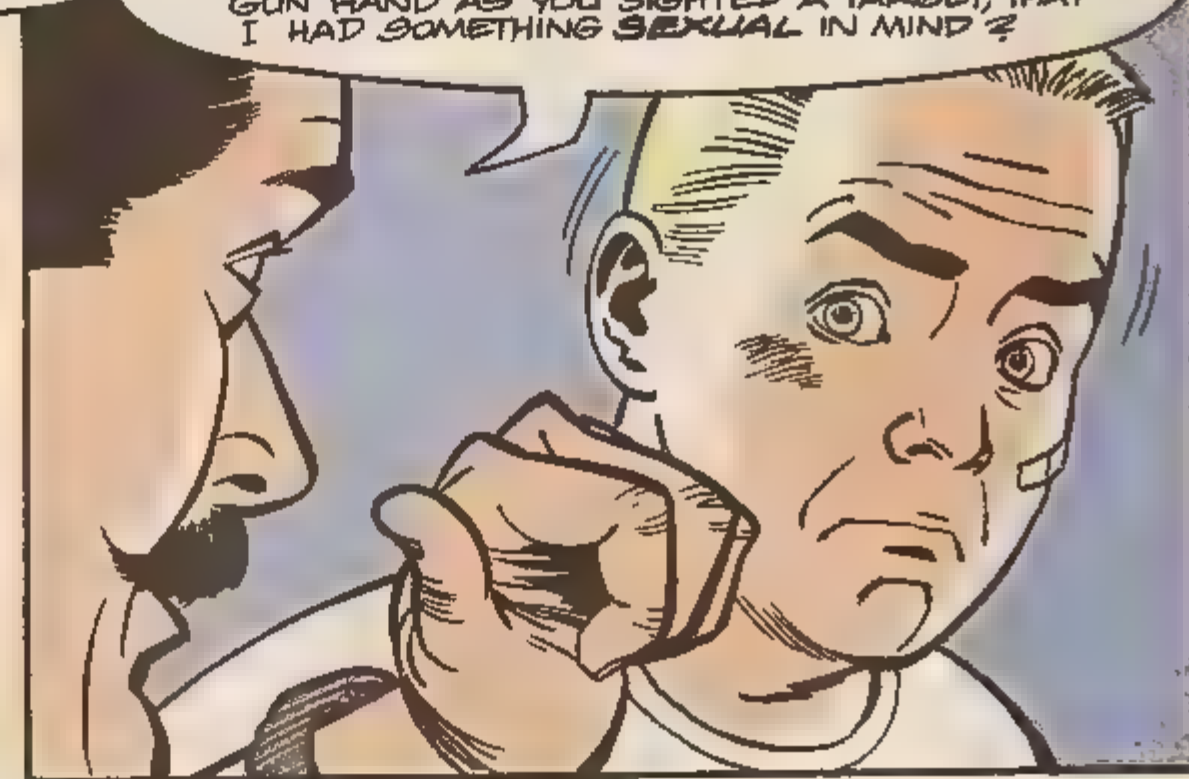
AS IT HAPPENS, I'VE BEEN CELIBATE FOR SOME  
YEARS. BUT ONLY AFTER I LOST, IN DEATH, THE  
MAN WHO HAD BEEN MY PARTNER, IN LIFE.  
WE MET IN THE MERCENARIES -- IT'S A  
BEAUTIFUL LOVE STORY, IN ITS WAY, BUT NONE  
OF YOUR BUSINESS, REALLY.

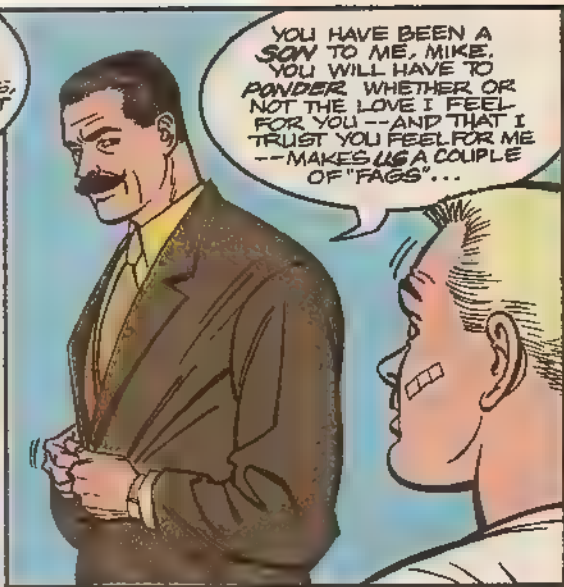
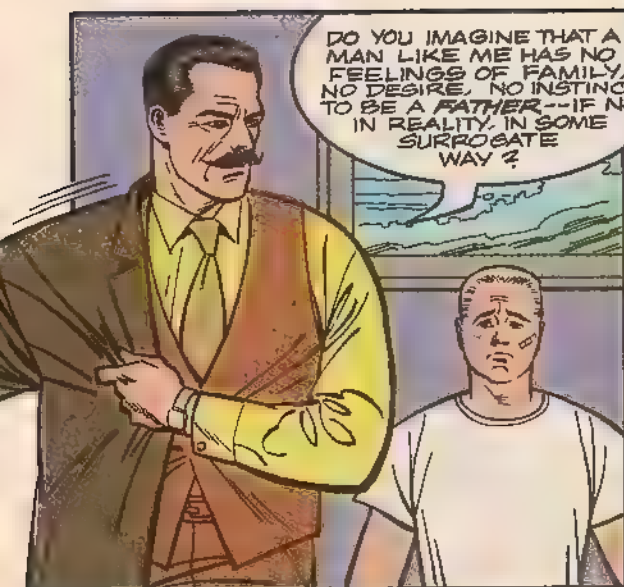


HE DIED ON FOREIGN SOIL, IN  
BATTLE, HIS HAND IN MINE. THERE  
WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER  
LIKE HIM, I'M AFRAID.



BUT THAT'S BESIDE THE POINT. THE FACT  
IS I AM "ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE." NOW-- DO  
YOU THINK, WHEN I PUT MY HAND ON YOUR  
SHOULDER, IN SUPPORT, OR GUIDED YOUR  
GUN HAND AS YOU SIGHTED A TARGET, THAT  
I HAD SOMETHING SEXUAL IN MIND?



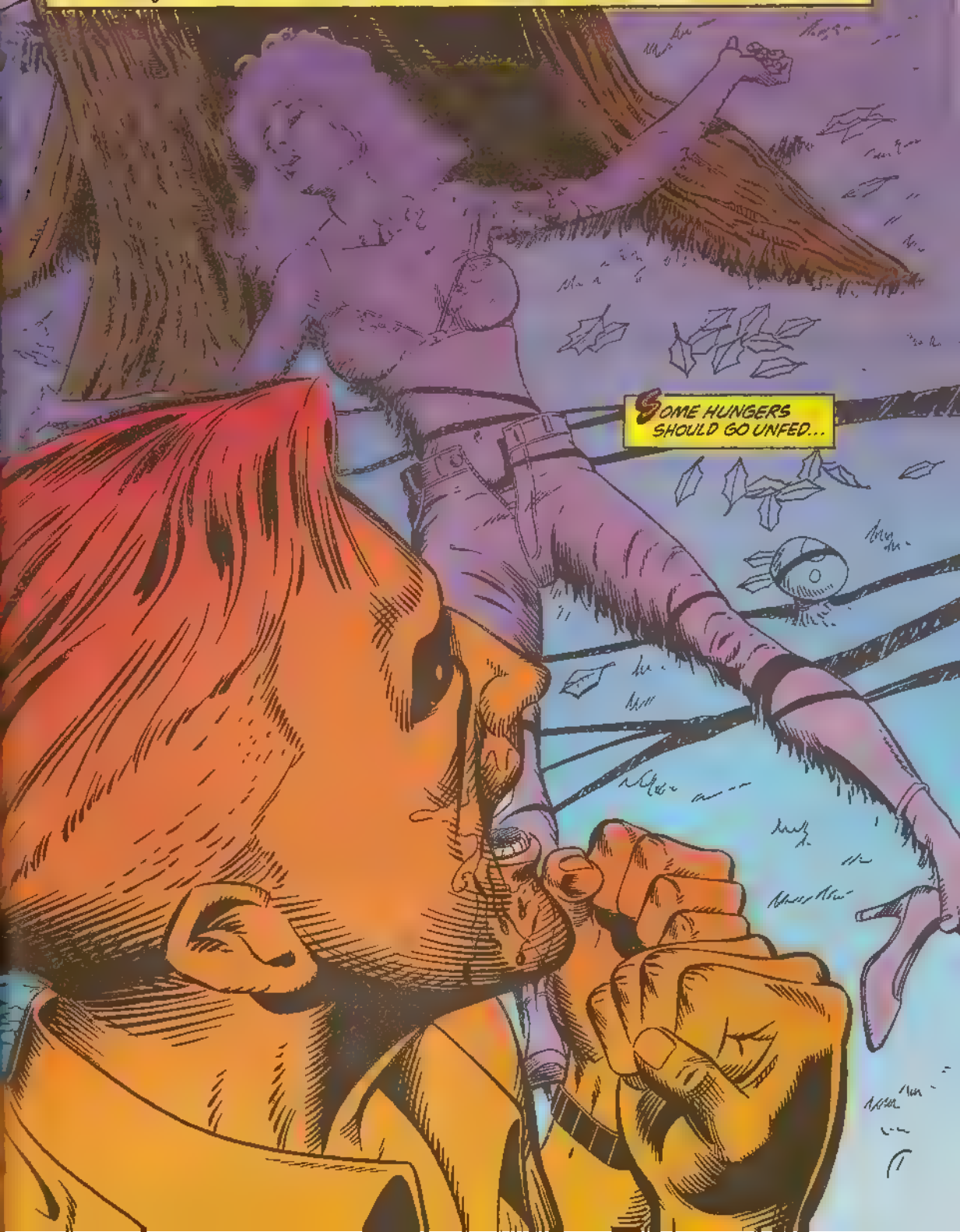


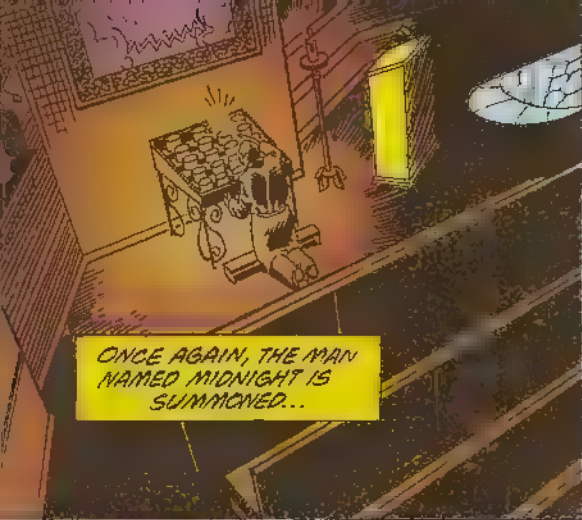


# CANNIBAL

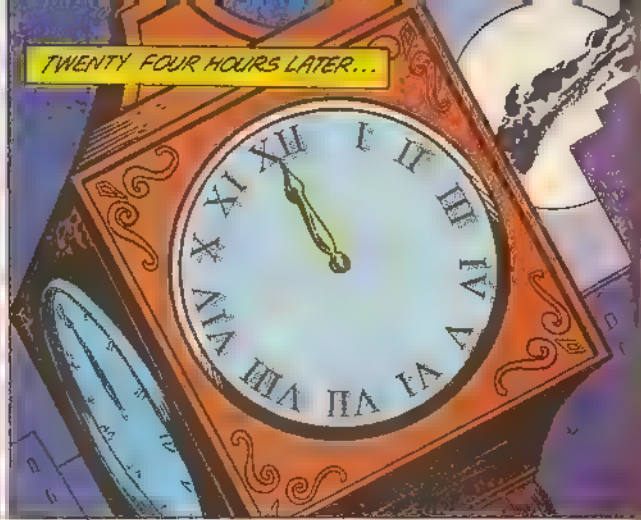
ED GORMAN GRAHAM NOLAN JOHN COSTANZA SAM PARSONS MIKE GOLD  
story art letters colors editor

**S**OME HUNGRERS  
SHOULD GO UNFED...

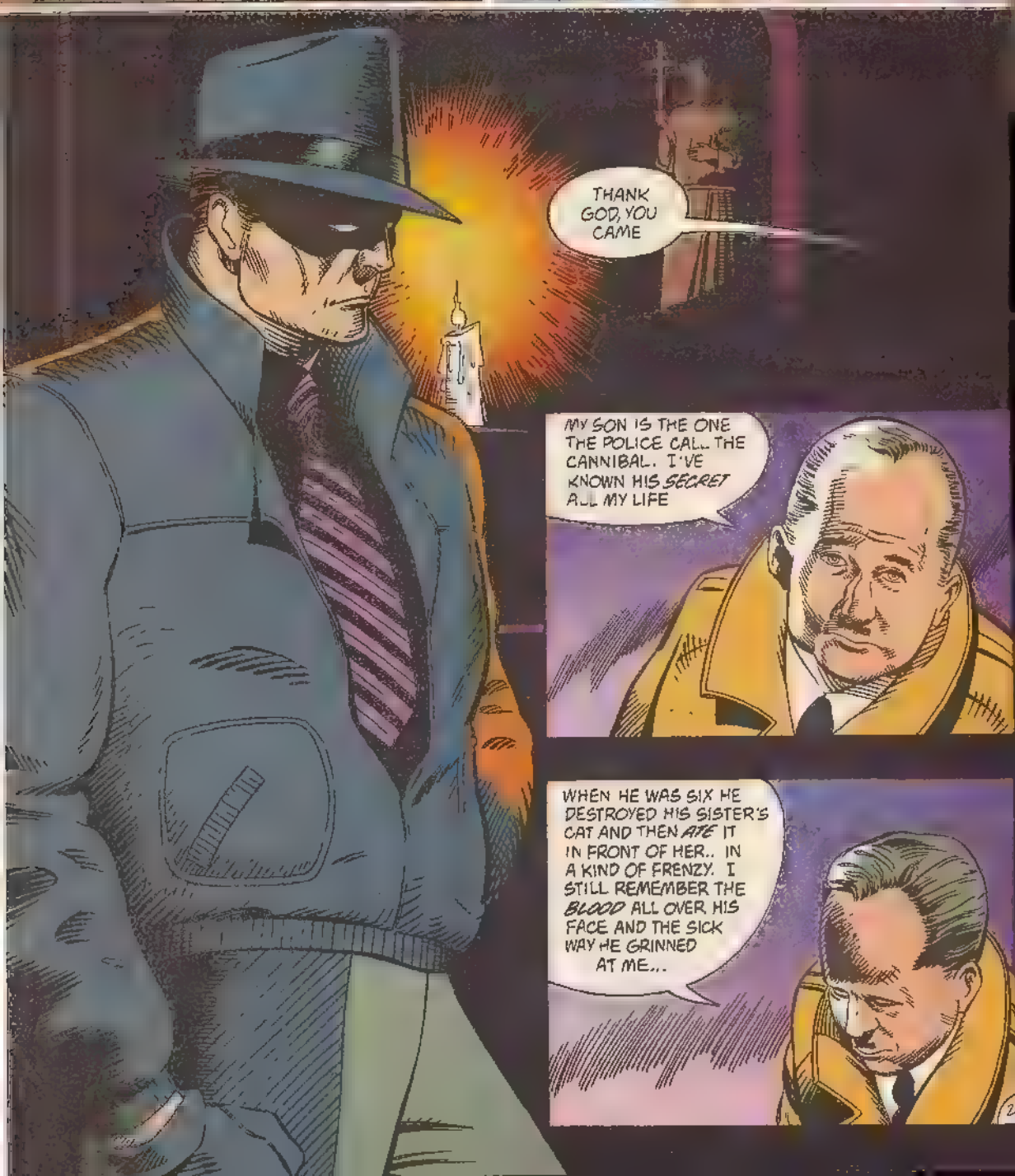




ONCE AGAIN, THE MAN  
NAMED MIDNIGHT IS  
SUMMONED...



TWENTY FOUR HOURS LATER...



THANK  
GOD, YOU  
CAME

MY SON IS THE ONE  
THE POLICE CALL THE  
CANNIBAL. I'VE  
KNOWN HIS *SECRET*  
ALL MY LIFE

WHEN HE WAS SIX HE  
DESTROYED HIS SISTER'S  
CAT AND THEN *ATE* IT  
IN FRONT OF HER.. IN  
A KIND OF FRENZY. I  
STILL REMEMBER THE  
*BLOOD* ALL OVER HIS  
FACE AND THE SICK  
WAY HE GRINNED  
AT ME...



DONALD FINDS HIS VICTIMS BY PLACING ADS IN THE PERSONALS COLUMN. HE'S LOOKING FOR WOMEN WHO REMIND HIM OF HIS FIANCEE. SHE DUMPED HIM FOR SOMEBODY ELSE. HE'S KILLING HER OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

good-looking WSM  
single woman for travel to  
of the world and for romping  
on nude beaches in the South of France Ext.

**ATTRACTIVE MARRIED MAN** who has an unfulfilling marriage is looking for a single or married woman to share his time with I'm looking for someone who can appreciate me and whom I can give loads of attention to If interested send photograph and I will respond to you Only responses containing photographs will be considered  
Box VH0220

**FASCINATING, ENERGETIC** (I never get tired) black professional male looking for a lovely woman for fun and fantasy I like Italian food and foreign movies and have a great sense of humor If you're interested in quiet chats and would like to meet a strong man call Ext 6551

THE AD IS ALWAYS THE SAME. HE SCREENS ALL THE WOMEN AND FINDS THE RIGHT ONE...

**LAMOUROUS**, 3' loves fun sports and a long-term relationship with an intelligent single white male who's tall and nonmaterialistic Ext 9099

**AN INVITATION TO PARADISE** successful good-looking WSM seeking a beautiful single woman for travel to exotic parts of the world and for romping on nude beaches in the South of France Ext. 1700

**ATTRACTIVE MARRIED MAN** who has an unfulfilling marriage is looking for a single or married woman to share his time with I'm looking for someone who can appreciate me and whom I can give loads of attention to If interested send photograph and I will respond to you Only responses containing photographs will be considered  
Box VH0220

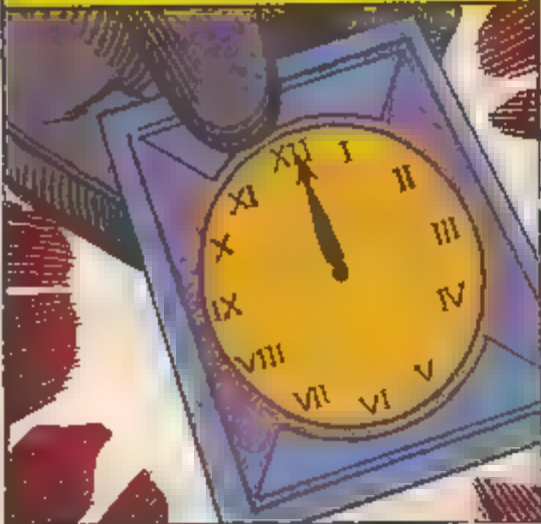
**FASCINATING, ENERGETIC** (I never get tired) black professional male looking for a lovely woman for fun and fantasy I like Italian food and foreign movies and have a great sense of humor If you're interested in quiet chats and would like to meet a strong man call Ext 6551

IF I TELL THE POLICE WHO MY SON IS, THEY'LL KILL HIM. BUT YOU COULD FIND HIM AND LET ME TALK TO HIM. THEN TURN HIM OVER TO THE AUTHORITIES



WILL YOU HELP?

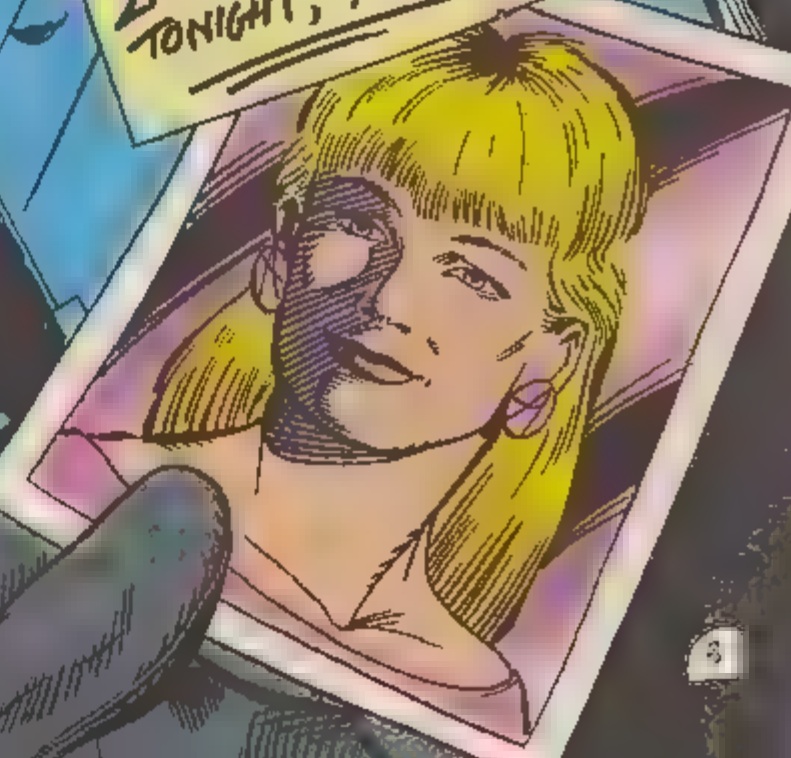
THOMAS WAXSMITH KNOWS THAT THE CARD MEANS MIDNIGHT WILL HELP...



NEXT EVENING, MIDNIGHT PAYS A LATE VISIT TO THE APARTMENT WHERE DONALD WAXSMITH LIVES...



WINONA KENT, ZANZIBAR DISCO TONIGHT, 10:30





# ZANZIBAR

PARKING  
IN REAR

THERE'S A ZANZIBAR IN EVERY CITY AND TOWN  
IN THE U.S. OF A. WHERE THE WORST ATTRIBUTES  
OF HUMANITY PREEN AND PRANCE THROUGH THE  
LONG, LONELY NIGHT...

OH, JOHNNY, I WISH  
YOU WERE HERE TONIGHT  
INSTEAD OF MY CREEPY  
HUSBAND...

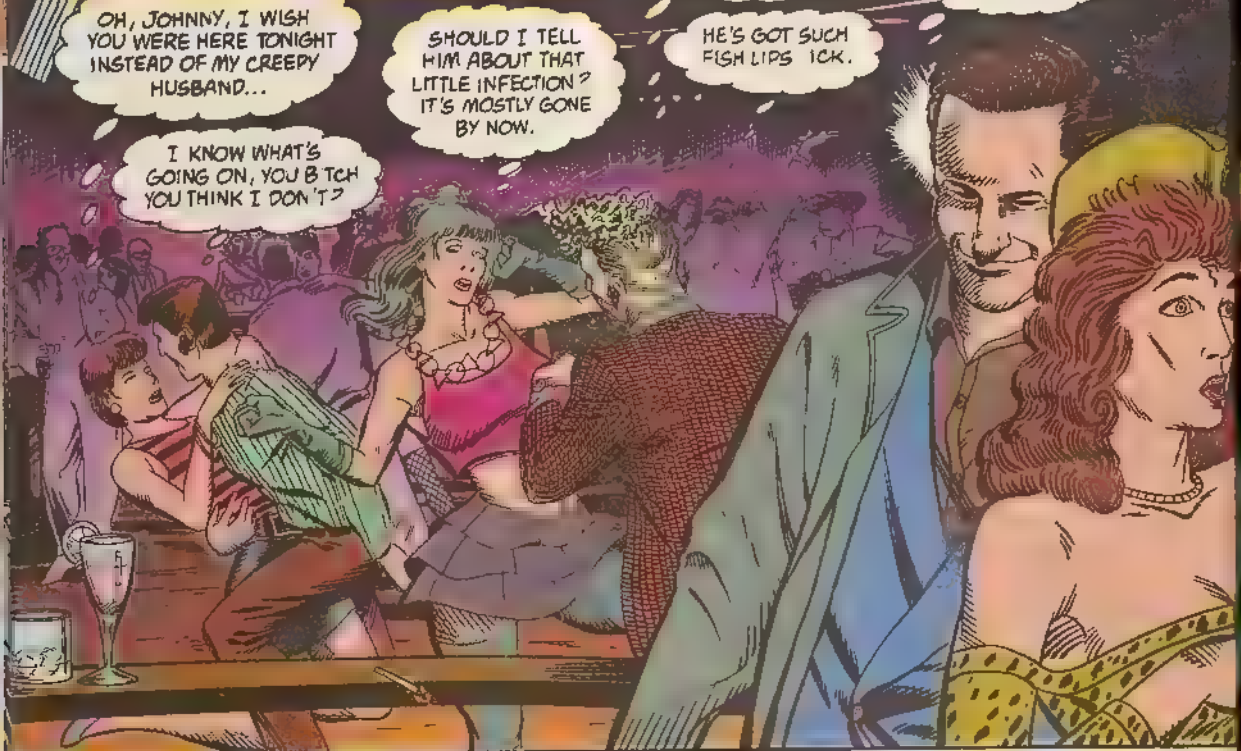
I KNOW WHAT'S  
GOING ON, YOU B TCH  
YOU THINK I DON'T?

SHOULD I TELL  
HIM ABOUT THAT  
LITTLE INFECTION?  
IT'S MOSTLY GONE  
BY NOW.

I WISH SHE HAD  
BIGGER BREASTS

TWO MONTHS SINCE  
I'VE HAD ANY  
SEX...

HE'S GOT SUCH  
FISH LIPS ICK.

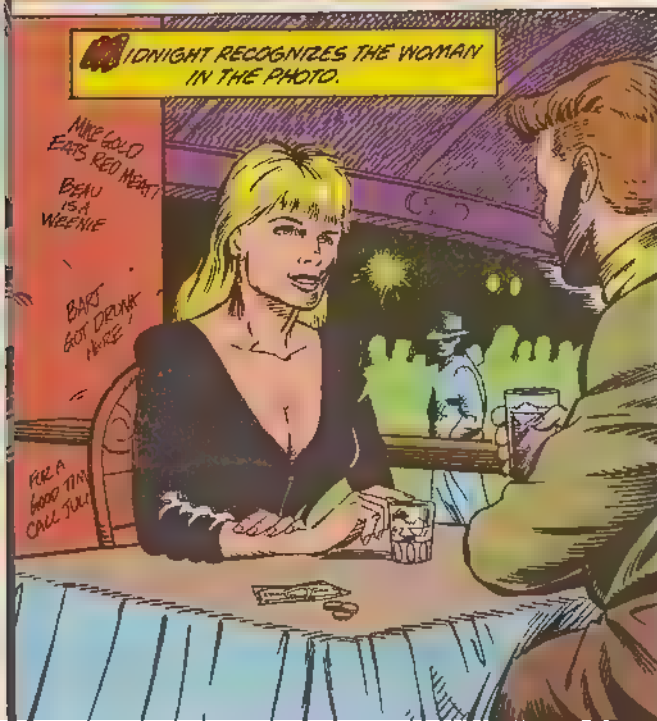


MIDNIGHT RECOGNIZES THE WOMAN  
IN THE PHOTO.

MIKE GOLD  
EATS RED MEAT  
BEAU  
ISA  
WEEFIE

BART  
GOT DRUNK  
NICE!

FOR A  
GOOD TIME  
CALL JILL

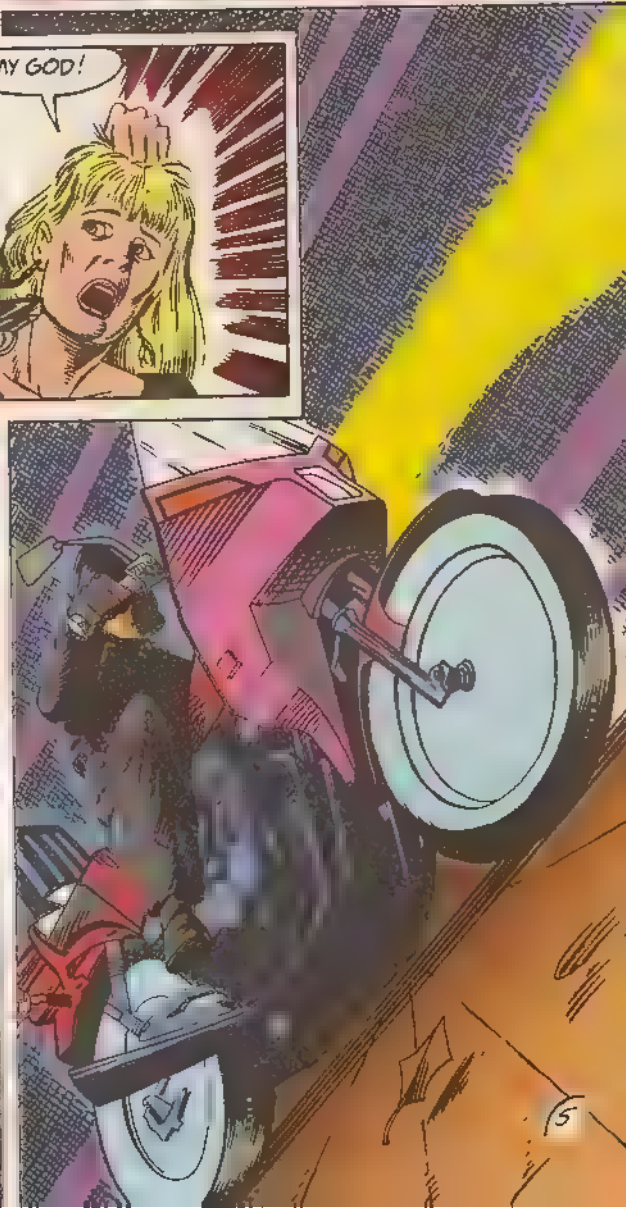
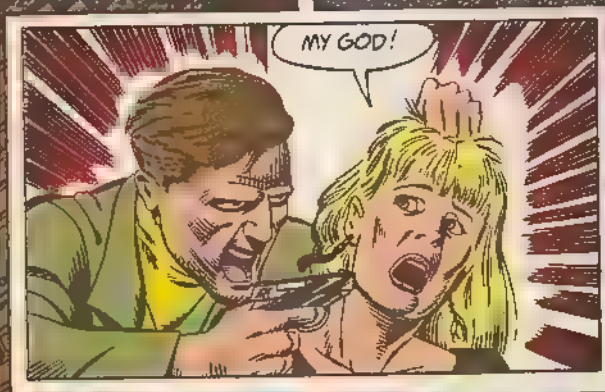


I'M REALLY GLAD YOU ANSWERED THE AD  
I'M HAVING A WONDERFUL TIME

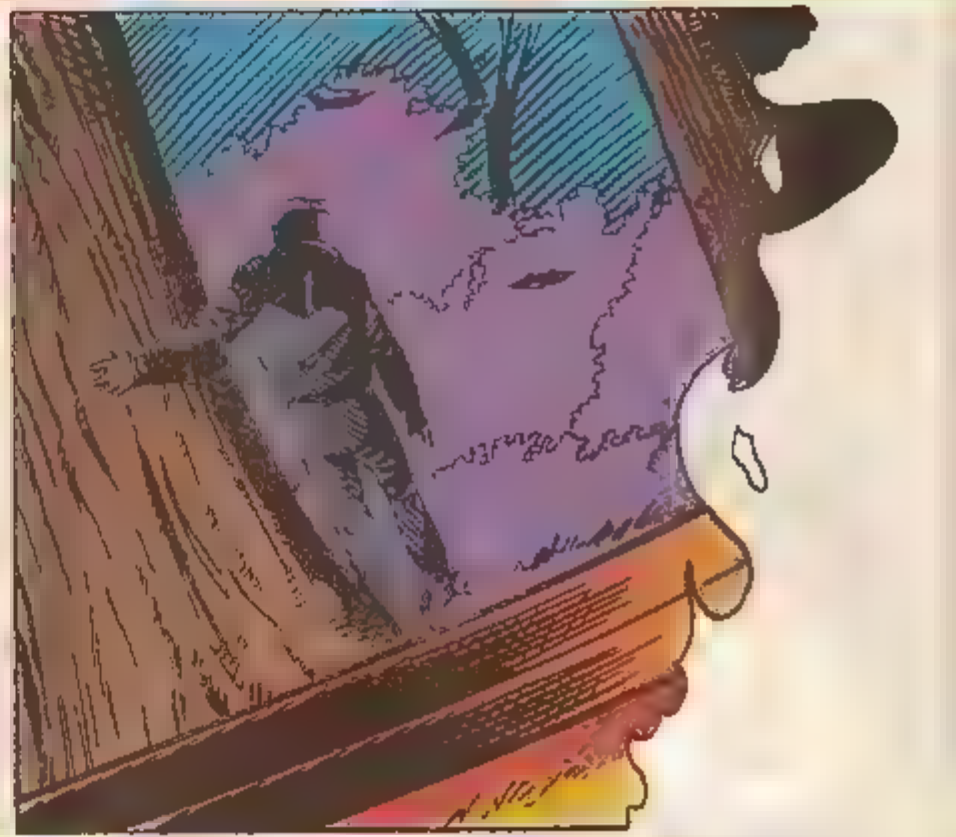
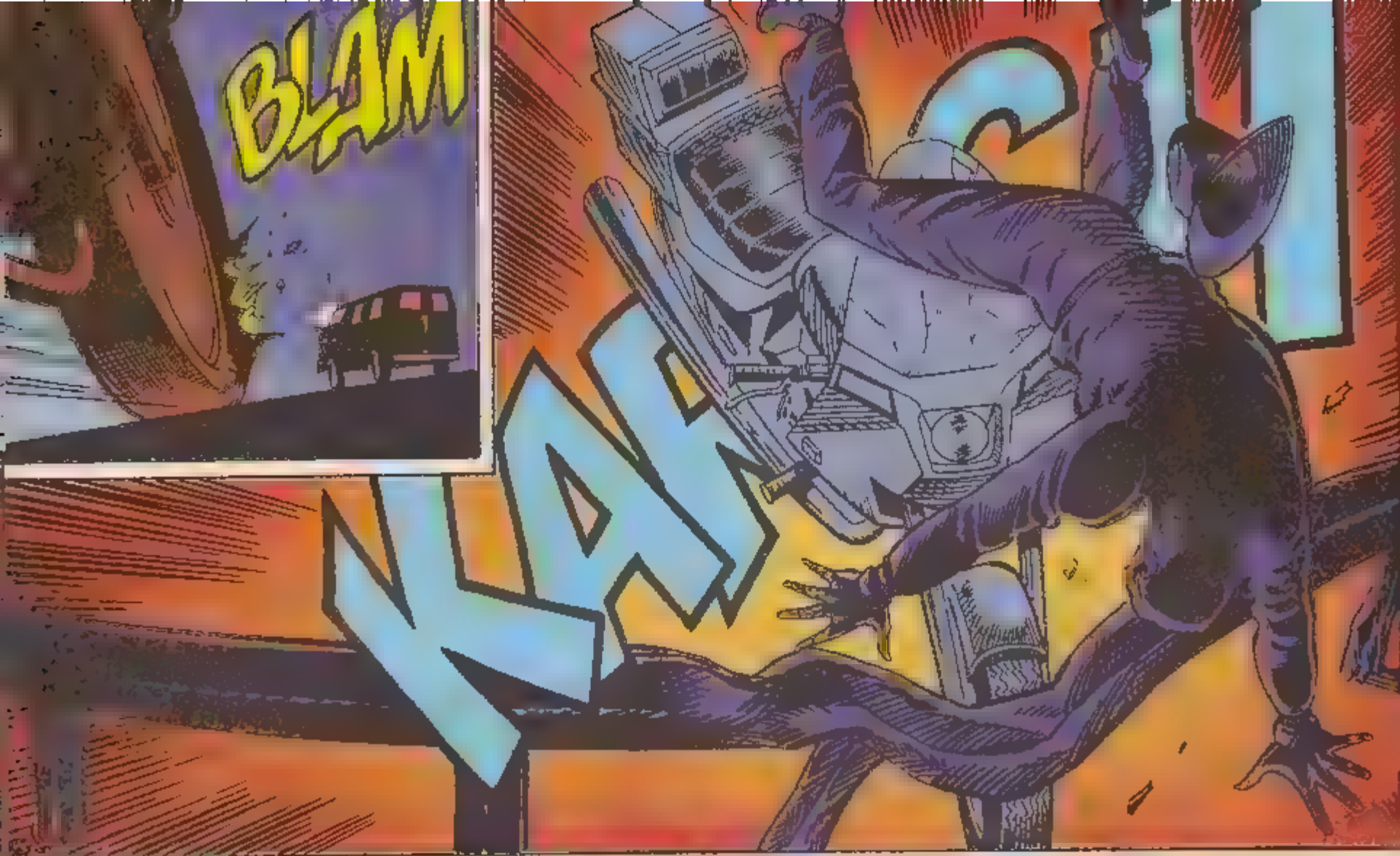
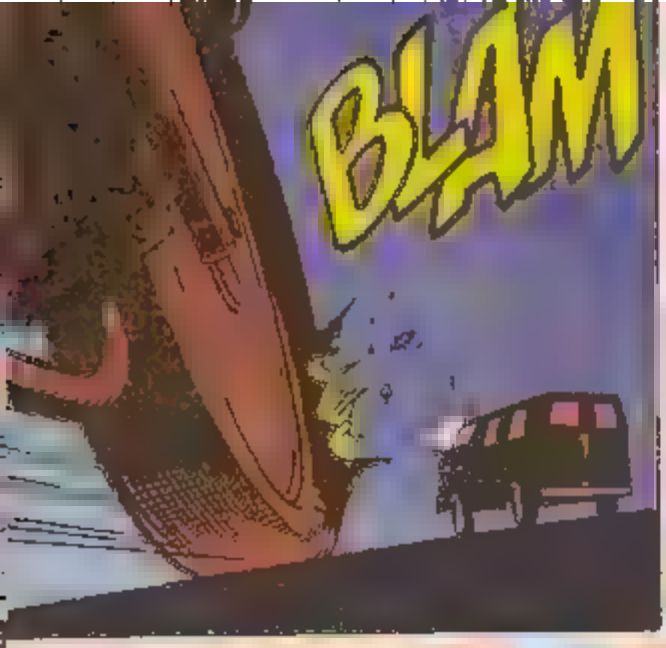
SO  
AM I.









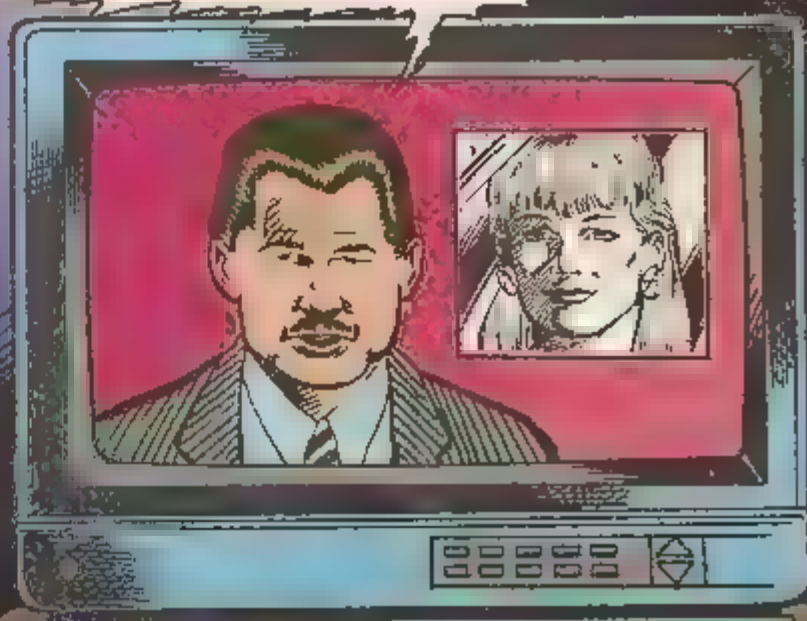


LATER THAT NIGHT, RECUPERATING FROM HIS CRASH, MIDNIGHT THINKS ABOUT THE WOMAN DONALD WAYSMITH MET IN THE ZANZIBAR.

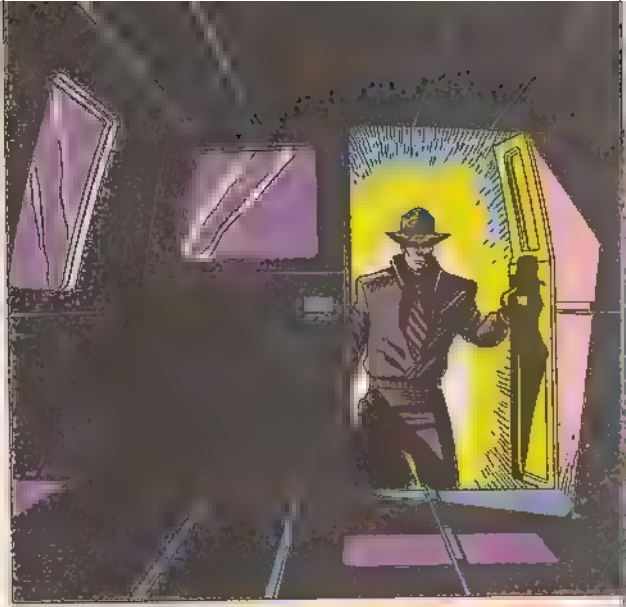
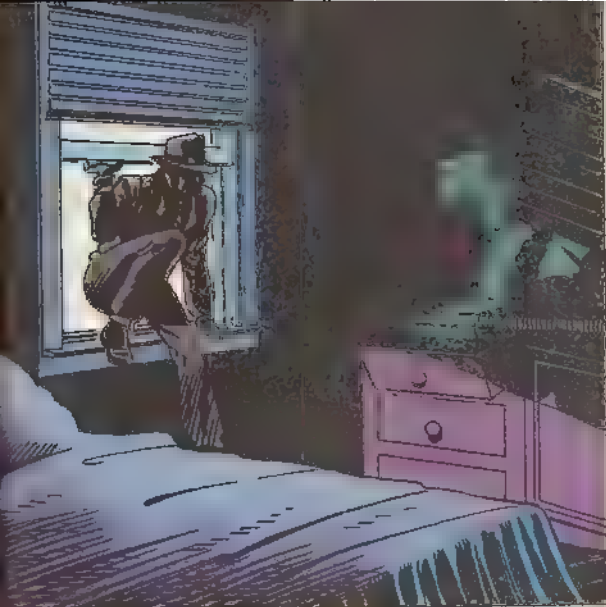


MORNING OF A SLEEPLESS NIGHT...

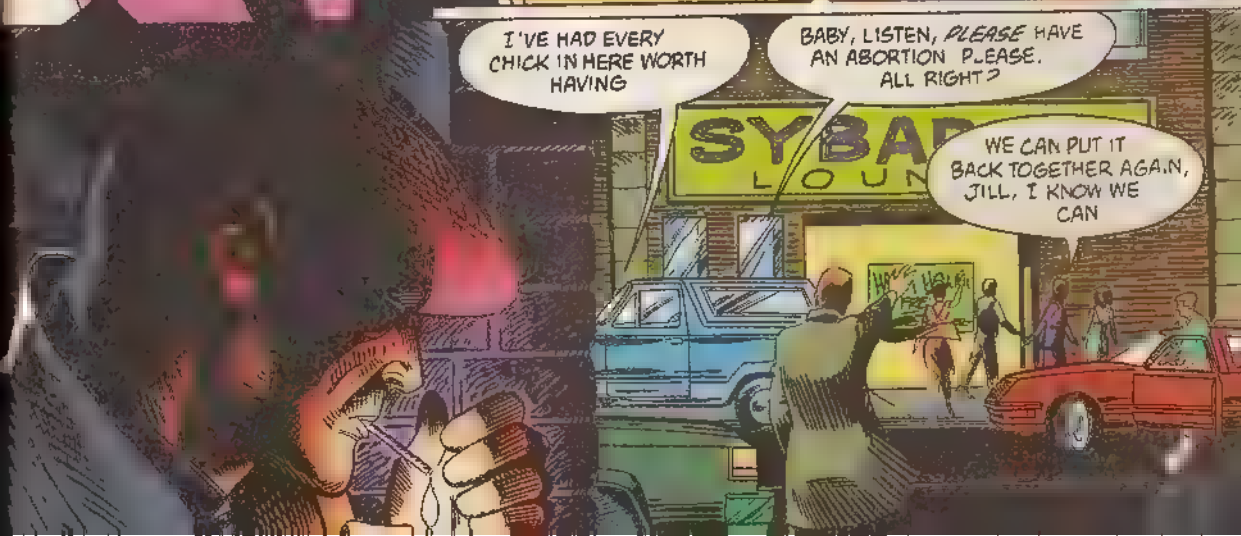
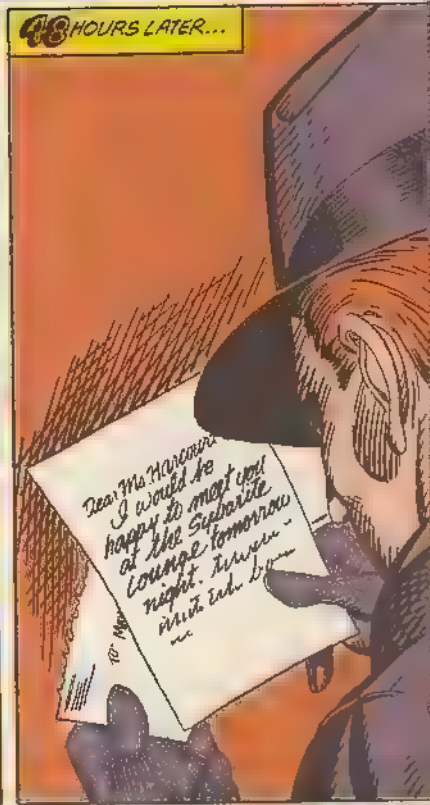
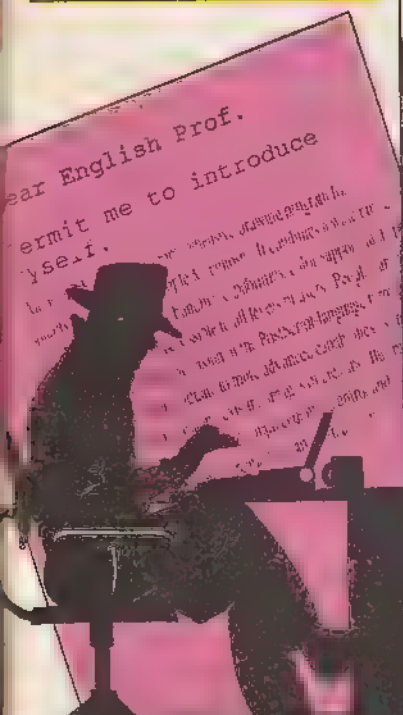
THE BADLY BUTCHERED BODY OF WINONA KENT WAS DISCOVERED ON A NORTHEASTERN ROADSIDE THIS MORNING. POLICE RELUCTANTLY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PARTS OF HER BODY WERE CANNIBALIZED.



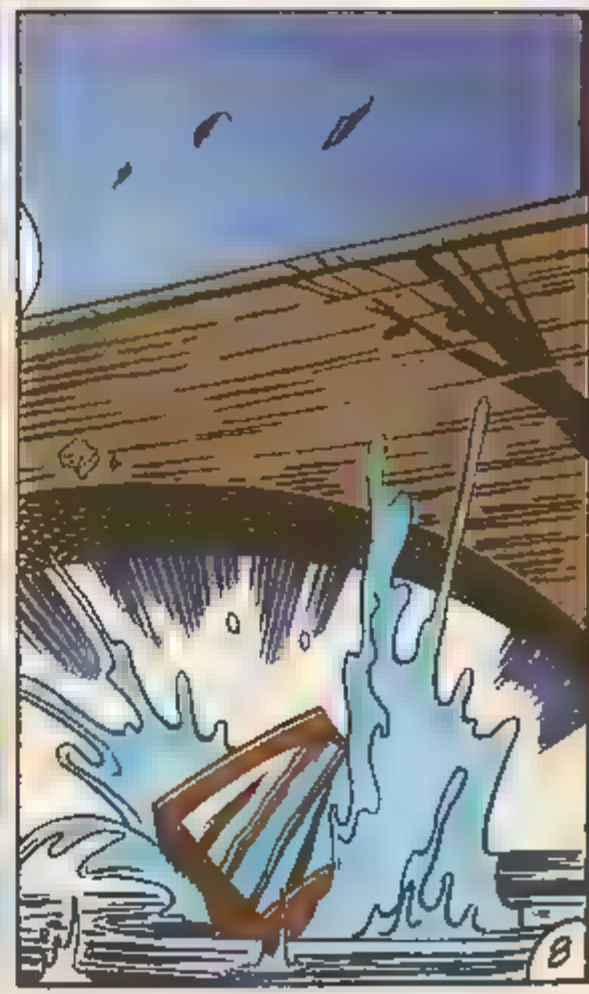
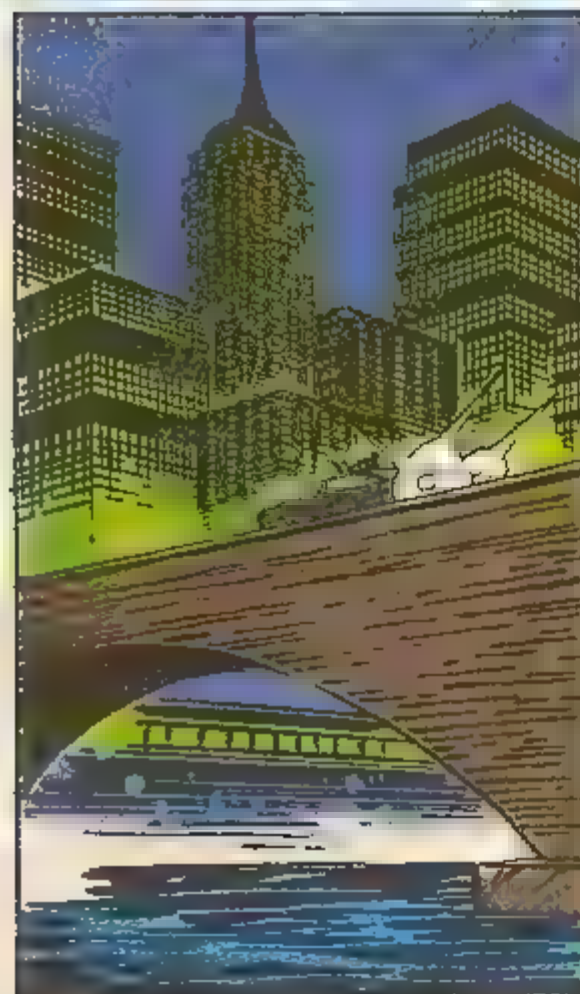
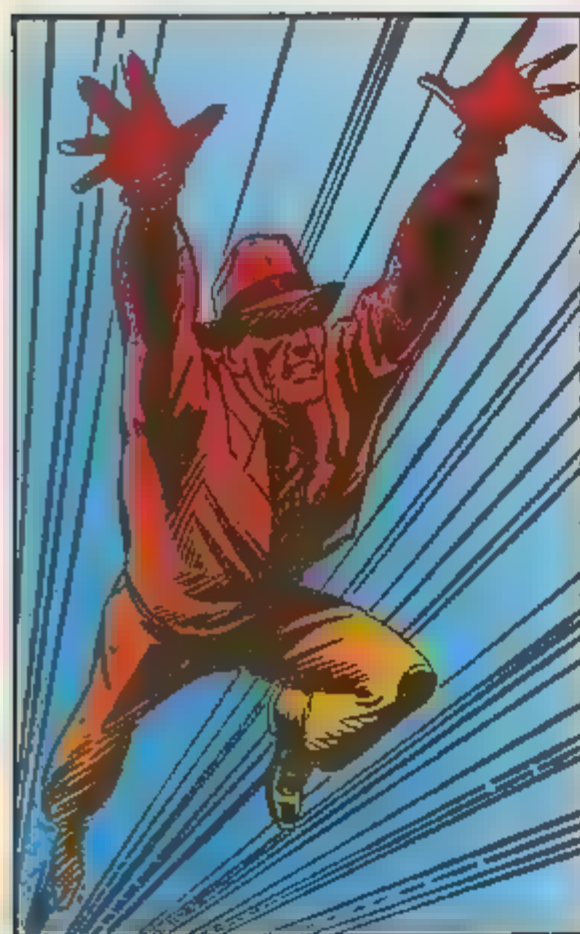
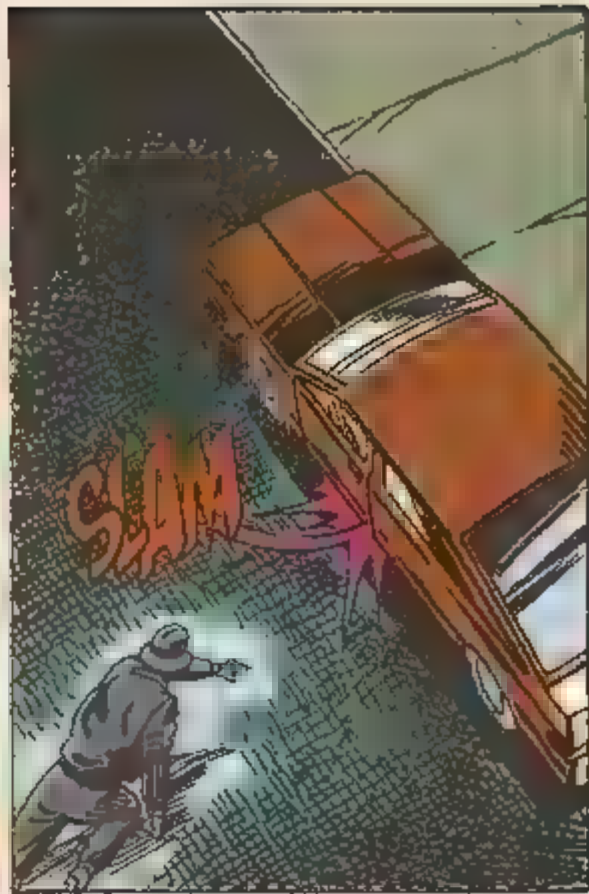
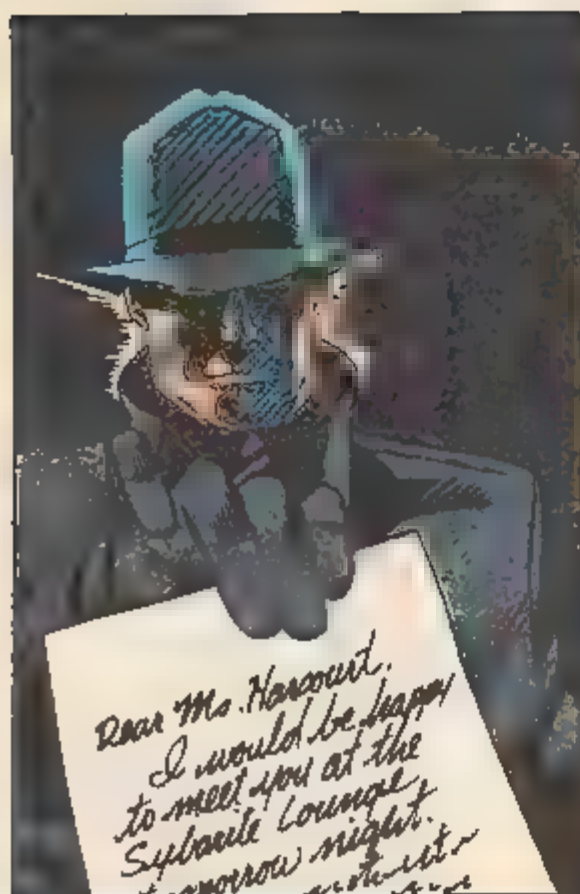




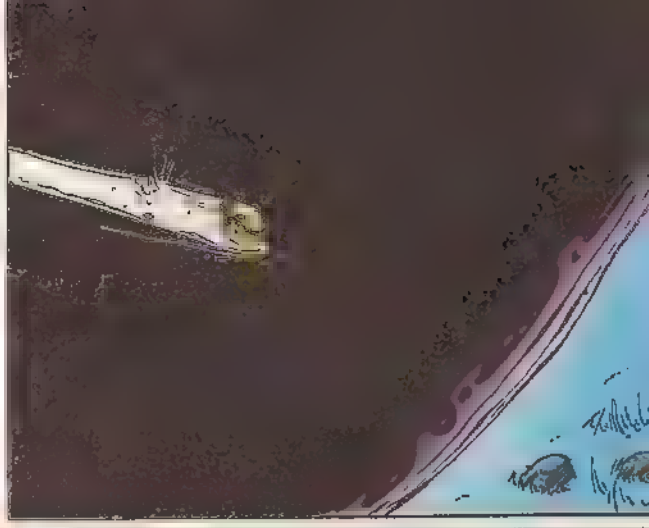
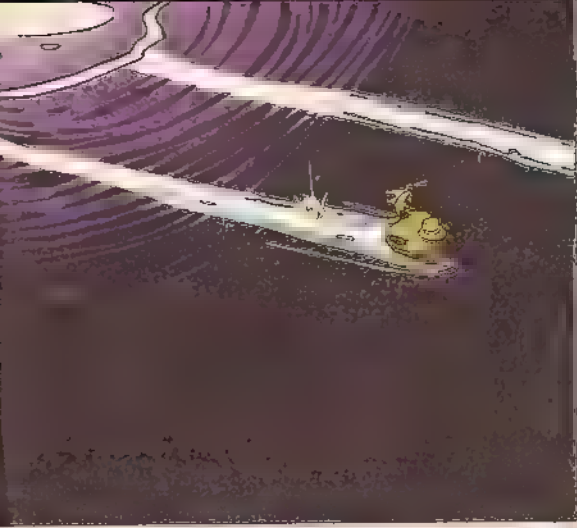
WITH DONALD WAYS, SMITH  
NOWHERE TO BE FOUND,  
MIDNIGHT RESORTS TO A RUSE..

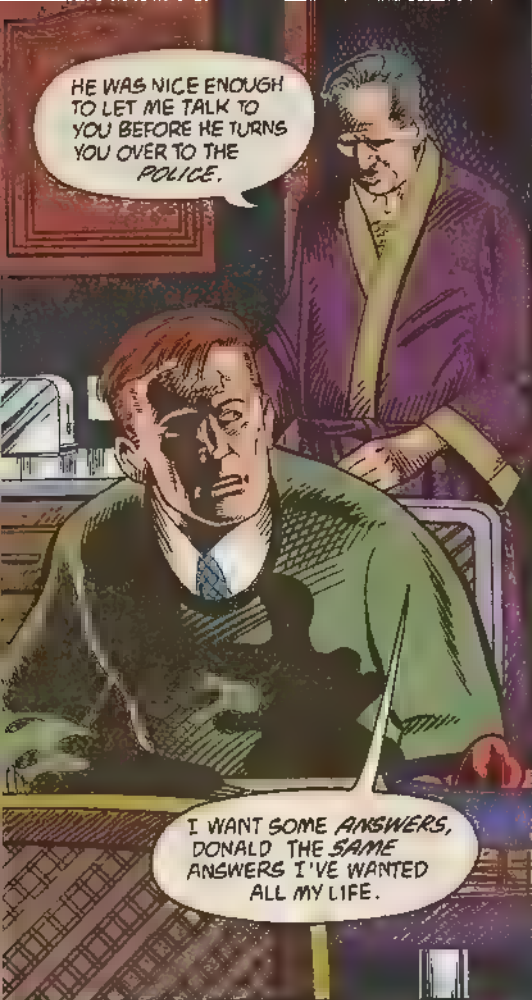












HE WAS NICE ENOUGH  
TO LET ME TALK TO  
YOU BEFORE HE TURNS  
YOU OVER TO THE  
POLICE.

I WANT SOME ANSWERS,  
DONALD THE SAME  
ANSWERS I'VE WANTED  
ALL MY LIFE.



IF I COULD  
EXPLAIN IT TO  
YOU, DAD, I  
WOULD. THEN  
I'D EXPLAIN  
IT TO MYSELF,  
TOO



ALL I CAN TELL  
YOU IS THAT I  
HAVE THIS  
NEED...THIS  
CRAVING.



ARE YOU SORRY FOR THE WAY  
YOU HURT THOSE GIRLS, SON?



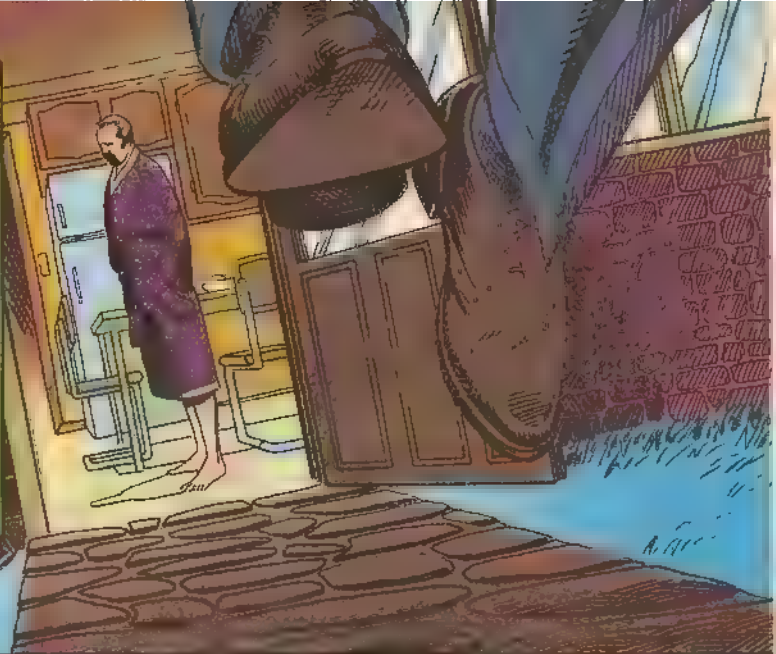
I WANT TO BE  
SORRY, DAD BUT I  
DON'T KNOW HOW.  
IT ISN'T IN ME.



I DON'T WANT TO  
LIVE MY LIFE IN A LOONY  
BIN YOU'VE GOT TO  
HELP ME ESCAPE.



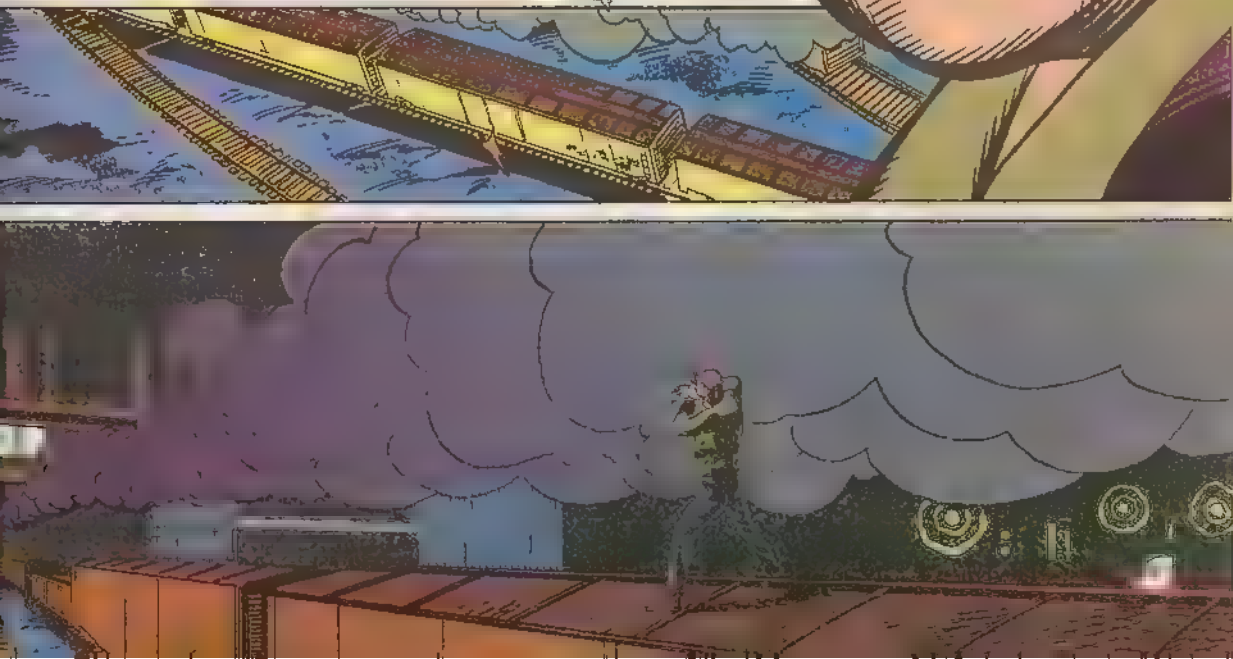
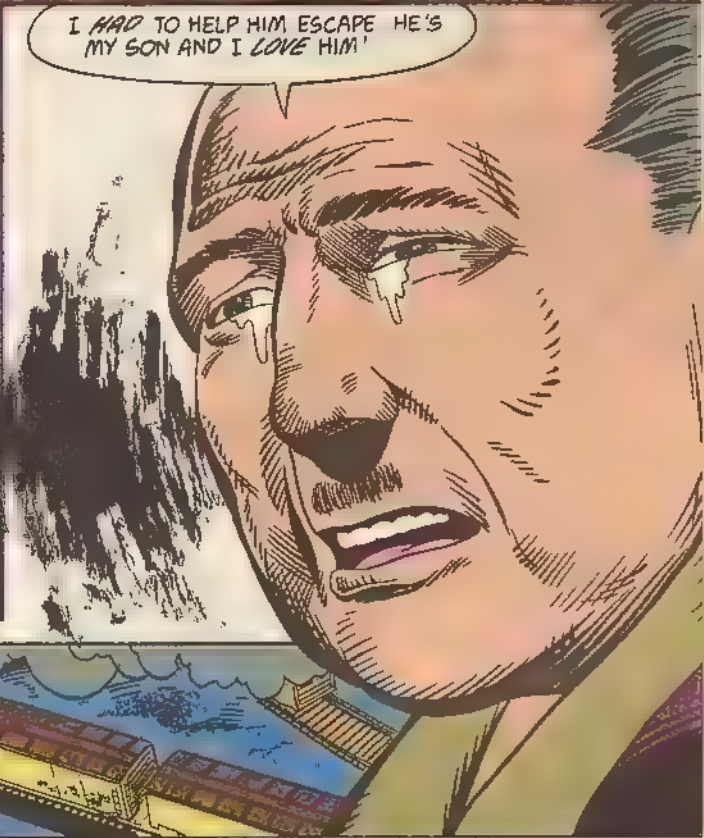
HEARING HIS SON'S ANIMAL  
DESPERATION, THOMAS WAYSMITH  
HAS NO CHOICE...

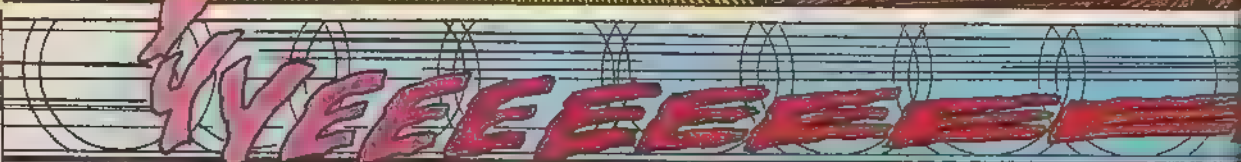
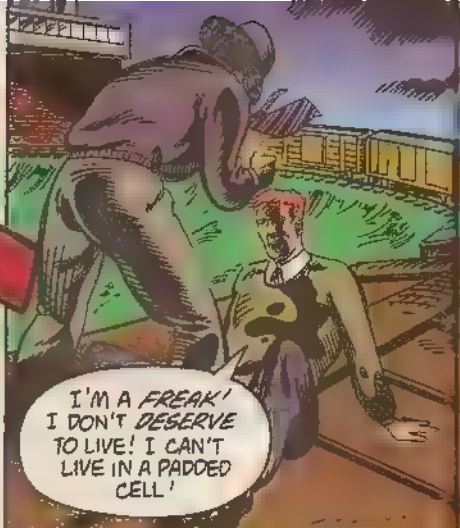
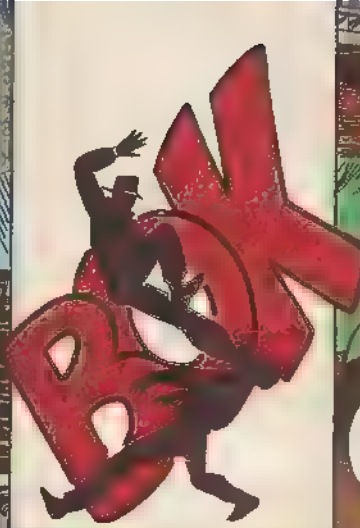


MOMENTS LATER...



I HAD TO HELP HIM ESCAPE HE'S  
MY SON AND I LOVE HIM!







# MS. TREE

**DC COMICS INC.**  
666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103

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L-5139

Dear Max and Friends,

Okay, I'll admit that when I saw the cover and splash page of MS. TREE #2, my first thought was, "Oh, no, not another Satanic cult story." I should have known better.

I was getting sick of the widespread Satan-paranoia gripping this country (carried to extremes when parents' groups recently had Halloween decorations removed from public classrooms), and was pleased to see an intelligent treatment of Satanism and the fear it inspires in others.

I'm a Christian (Lutheran) myself, but I've always been bothered by the intolerance of my more vocal brethren, however, I've never been able to understand why anyone would worship Satan. Wicca, which too many people lump together with Satanism, is an entirely different matter, because it is not at all related to Christianity. But as for Satanism, I could never imagine why (apart from rebellion against traditional values) anyone would choose to worship the symbol of evil.

"The Devil's Punchbowl" provided a logical rationale for Satan worship. I can understand how some people would see Satan as a Prometheus figure, the provider of divine knowledge. I still don't agree, but now I can understand why others might.

Mind you, I wasn't entirely pleased with the story. I found Janichek to be just another stereotypical Fundamentalist, a caricature which is rapidly growing tiresome. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, the intolerant, hypocritical Christians also tend to be the most vocal, giving observers a distorted view of Christianity. Christians such as Janichek do exist (to a lesser degree), but they are still overused in fiction.

As a sidenote, I found Janichek's "philosophy" reminiscent of a quote by (I believe) Woody Allen: "Christ died for our sins. Dare we make his sacrifice useless by not committing them?" Odd how this idea is funny in Allen's hands, but frightening in Janichek's. Of course, Woody had different "sins" in mind.

I must say that I'm a little disappointed in "Midnight." I can't help but feel that the only reason Midnight was chosen for revival as a "grim, gritty" crimefighter is his name. This incarnation bears absolutely no resemblance to the original, which is good in a way. Since it is clearly a new character, it doesn't really invite comparison with the original. It does not "invalidate" any of Jack Cole's classic stories.

Erich Mees  
Emory University  
P.O. Box 21120  
Atlanta, GA 30322

• • • • •

Dear Max and Terry,

A little better. That's how I'd compare issue #2 to #1. But is Michael becoming a total vigilante now? I hope not, but it certainly seems that way. Also, maybe I'm

just remembering wrong, but I don't remember seeing thought balloons used in the old series, as they were in this issue. If I'm remembering correctly, is there a reason for this?

I do hope you are able to write the letter columns, as I always enjoyed your columns in the past. Plus, Mr. Gold doesn't seem to be able to appreciate simple sarcasm.

The "Midnight" story sucked. It was full of melodramatic clichés.

Fred Averick  
32-11 75th St.  
Jackson Heights, NY 11370

It is well-known that Mr. Gold prefers complex sarcasm.

• • • • •

Dear Editor,

Ms. Tree is a trigger-happy harpy. *Time* magazine wouldn't have it any other way.

*Time* wants the United States government to seize the guns of its citizenry.

Therefore, DC Comics — an apple-polishing subordinate of *Time* — advances this totalitarian goal by showcasing an irrational private gun owner: one Ms. Tree.

Indeed, Ms. Tree should use her gun only when she or another innocent person might be killed.

But otherwise Ms. Tree ought to use judo on her adversaries. That's what Honey West would do.

John Rohlfing  
13802 Gunther St.  
Garden Grove, CA 92643

For the record, DC Comics and *Time Magazine* are different divisions of Time-Warner; *Time* remains part of the old Time-Life magazine group, while DC is part of the Warner Bros. studio. You know, the people who make the *Dirty Harry* movies.

Loved the Honey West reference, though.

• • • • •

Dear Max, Terry, Mike, et al.,

There's so much to praise about the new MS. TREE QUARTERLY, about every MS. TREE, in fact, that I hardly know where to begin. So I'll just plunge in, first giving commendations to Mike Gold and DC for having the discernment to take on board the (I feel) most well-crafted and interesting comic book now being produced.

Secondly, I must state that one of the primary qualities that makes MS. TREE so extraordinary is the complete, complementary entwining of writing and art, which produces a final comprehensive unity seldom paralleled. This is a genuine collaboration.

Hence, it is not easy to pull out certain aspects to praise, as the whole is more than the sum of the parts (as in all quality

artwork). So, for the purpose of brevity I will unjustifiably ignore Max this letter and concentrate on Terry.

Two points stand out for me in the art in this issue, wherein I see Terry really stretching, positively expanding his previous work. One: the range of "character types" he employs, and two: the impressive variety of subtle facial expressions he delineates.

A true strength of Terry's art is that he is working within a tradition, but that's the subject of another letter. On to my second appreciation. We exist now in a comic art world where all characters seem to survive with only three expressions: straight mouth, smiling straight mouth, and screaming. Terry, however, is pushing and extending the medium.

I must criticize the cover. While I feel the idea of painted covers is good, this example is both not well painted, and insulting. Yes, yes, sex sells and I want MS. TREE to succeed. But this adolescent peepshow is not in keeping with the character of Ms. Tree. It smacks of so-called "adult" comics that are anything but that, being rather usually no more than gratuitous, puberty-age soft porn.

Please don't go too far in the direction of cliché and thereby alienate a discerning audience. I know you may say this is a small point, but it is not when MS. TREE as a package is always so consistent. This cover is voyeuristic, sexist Hollywood, neither in keeping with our times nor with Max and Terry, who have always managed to include sex, but in a more truly adult, mature fashion. Particularly they include sex in which Ms. Tree is a knowing participant; this is a world of difference.

I must close with heartfelt compliments, though, as the QUARTERLY as a whole is so fine. Just stick closer to Max and Terry's vision.

Mark Staff Brandt  
Toggenburgerstr 800  
CH-9230 Flawil  
SWITZERLAND

• • • • •

Dear Mr. Gold,

MS. TREE QUARTERLY. God, those words sound beautiful.

I don't mind telling you, I've really missed this lady and her hard-hitting detective work, her hard-line attitude towards her enemies and the classic simplicity of the stories themselves.

When Renegade Press went under, and took the previous *Ms. Tree* book with it, it was a low point in my faith in the industry as a whole.

When DC announced plans to revive the character, I could hardly believe it. Indeed, until I actually had this first issue in my hands, I didn't really let myself believe it. DC, the only big publisher in America today that doesn't encourage creator-owned books as a rule, is picking up MS. TREE? I don't recall hearing that Hell froze over or anything...



Still, solid proof is solid proof, and I can't argue the fact that the book is here (in glorious color) and the DC logo is sitting happily in the top left corner. Besides, I'm too jazzed to argue anyway: the important thing is that she's back, and hopefully here to stay.

This first issue is without question one of the most pleasurable comics I've read in some time. I'd forgotten over the last few years just how good the MS. TREE series looked in full color, and so seeing the color back in this first installment was something of a revelation. I had also forgotten what it was like to get an entire MS. TREE story in one shot, uninterrupted. BOY did it feel good!

I had been intending, when I started reading the issue and thinking about the letter I knew I was gonna write, to ask that we hold a moratorium on any further appearances by the Muerta family for a while. I was beginning to think they'd been done to death in the course of the previous book, and I wanted to move on to other things.

Those feelings are still there, but after reading this issue's story to its conclusion, they've gone on the back burner as far as I'm concerned. Ms. Tree (and Max's) first priority is to nail this "don Donnie" creepoid, and nail him good. And I hope it takes at least three issues to do it, too. Make him sweat.

(Oh, sure, I know that with quarterly publication and such a big chunk of story pages in each issue that you might find a continued story a little daunting, but I think if you have a little faith in us diehard MS. TREE fans we might surprise you with what we'll put up with.)

As for the "Midnight" back up series, so far this first episode looks pretty good but I do have one or two minor quibbles. For starters, I'm not sure that I agree with the concept of his not saying anything, even in thought balloons. Even The Silent Knight got to show us what he was thinking, and I think it adds to characterization if we can have

some insight into a character's thoughts. So I think you and writer Gorman could ease up a little.

Finally, as to the Illustrated Story. I like the concept. Every so often, prose is capable of conveying things that we might miss if we're busy looking at the artwork; it can add levels of tension when we have to imagine what something or someone looks like instead of being able to see it in front of us. I also like the concept of having different characters grace the Illustrated Story section, and I look forward to all of the various ones you've promised us so far.

I'm glad Ms. Tree's back, and I'm glad DC's got her. It shows there's hope for you guys yet.

David Peattie  
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Concord, CA 94521

Actually, DC's been publishing creator-owned stuff for some time: SKREEMER and THE BUTCHER (to name but two) preceded MTQ. There will be a lot more a-comin'.

o o o o o

Dear Respondent,

Please don't hack MS. TREE to death. If you don't believe that villain Philmore Janichek and his "Cleanse Bloomington Committee" in MS. TREE QUARTERLY #2's "The Devil's Punchbowl" by Max Allan Collins wasn't an uninspired rehash of Collins' own WILD DOG villain B. Lyle Layman and his Legion of Decency, then I'd be curious to know why not. Both made loud noises in public about morality, spearheading morality crusades, while privately committing murder and lechery.

One might expect that, of all people, Max Collins would have learned the lesson of Dick Tracy creator Chet Gould's legacy: a variety of colorful villains is an important

ingredient of success for a comic detective series. (A quick check of the Batman's rogues gallery will show that DC certainly learned this lesson).

Since the flamboyant cartoonishness of the Gould strip's villains is not the distinctive characteristic of the villains in Collins' DC material (though Terry Beatty's depiction of Janichek was certainly a cartoon or caricature), to what do the antagonists in MS. TREE QUARTERLY (and WILD DOG) owe their distinctiveness? Plot and characterization are the tools Collins uses to distinguish one villain from another.

In the case of Janichek and Layman, the similarities outweigh the differences. Is the Collins well running dry, or does he have a literary obsession that's interfering with his creative judgment?

A variety of colorful villains is important for, but not necessary to, success. I've heard there's a series of books called *The Executioner* that pits its protagonist against the same villains every episode, and Ms. Tree's own Muerta vendetta was similar in content to what I've heard about that series. In both cases, however, a clear motivation (revenge) was established as the premise for what ensued.

What was Collins' motive in cloning Layman (Janichek)? Laziness? Please don't hack MS. TREE to death.

David Malcolm Porta  
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Sacramento, CA 95820-3801

o o o o o

**NEXT SEASON:** An old flame pops back into Ms. Tree's life, as his wife's pilot light flickers out. Guess who's the prime suspect? Plus, another Midnight thriller, of course.

— Mike Gold





Part of him ached to leap from the boulders and join the chanting, dancing throng, who had resumed circling the fire clockwise. What if it were true, he thought. What if they could banish the white man through the supreme act of faith? Would the buffalo return to the prairie? The white man's education couldn't entirely erase those feelings from his soul — there was something in every Lakota, probably in every human being including whites, that responded to the ancient call of faith. The white man had turned his back on mysticism, but the red man still clung to it — it was the cornerstone of a life rich in meaning.

The dancing became more frenetic. Some young men threw themselves to the ground in a frenzy and writhed as if possessed. Others leaped high into the air, performing a complicated series of maneuvers before touching down. Occasionally a dancer would break from the circle to take a drink from one of numerous circulating bottles.

Butcher thought about ditching his pistol and joining them — in their present state, they probably wouldn't notice. He found himself shaking his leg in time to the rhythm, and wondered again if Crippled Elk might not have real power — power enough to influence his enemies.

As the shouting and dancing reached a crescendo, Crippled Elk stepped out of the western darkness — stepped out of the black path of war and destruction, his hands held high. At once the assembly

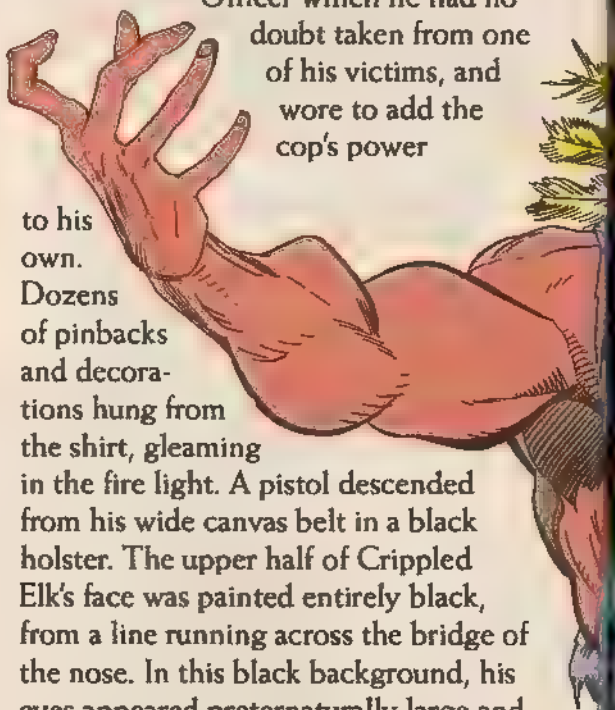
fell silent. Crippled Elk wore a buffalo horn bonnet decorated with eagle feathers, probably obtained in defiance of DNR

law. He wore the torn blue shirt of a South Dakota State Highway Patrol Officer which he had no doubt taken from one of his victims, and wore to add the cop's power

to his own. Dozens of pinbacks and decorations hung from the shirt, gleaming in the fire light. A pistol descended from his wide canvas belt in a black holster. The upper half of Crippled Elk's face was painted entirely black, from a line running across the bridge of the nose. In this black background, his eyes appeared preternaturally large and luminous, as if lit from within.

"Brethren," Crippled Elk rumbled in a voice like rolling thunder. "The one known as Crippled Elk has brought you this far, but in order for us to succeed in

# BUTCHER™



# GHOST

MIKE BARON • WRITER

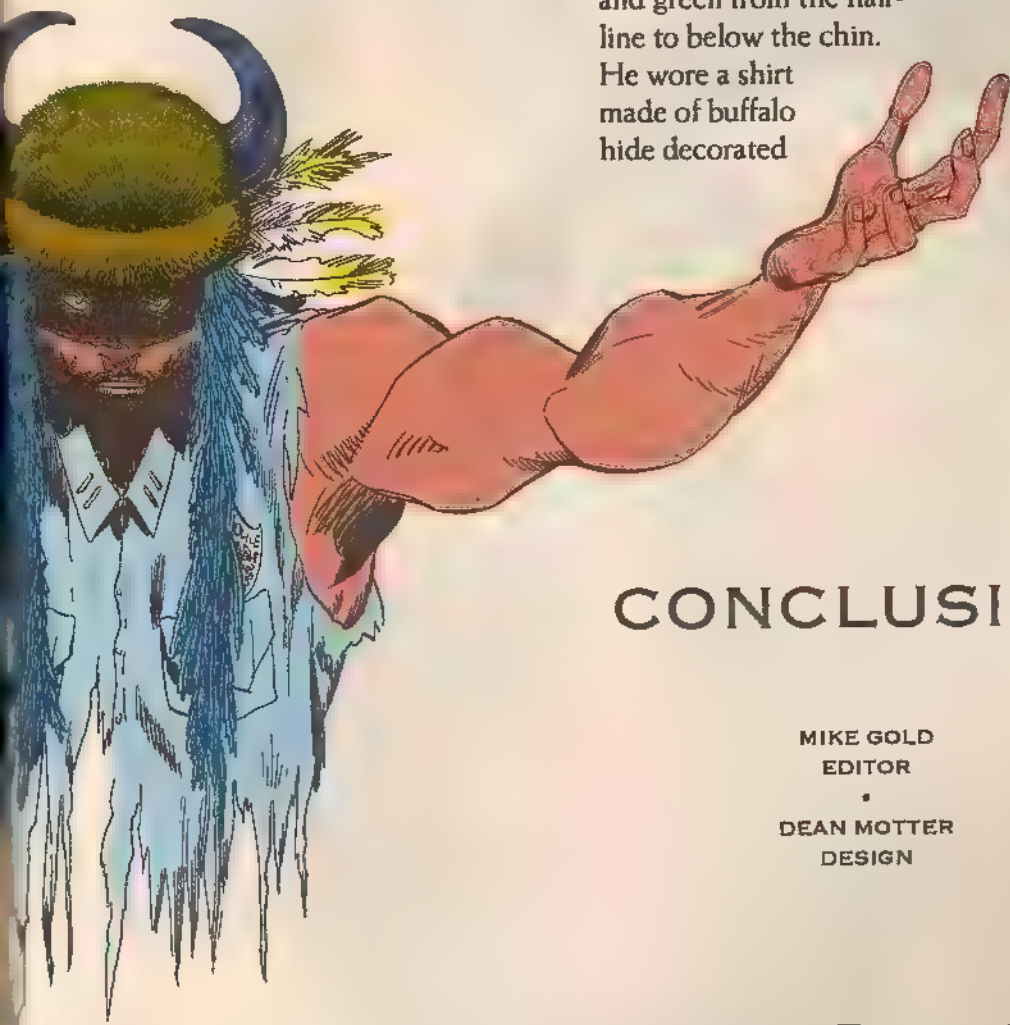
driving the white man from the center of the earth, we need a great old warrior, one who is steeped in blood, one who will not hesitate! It is no longer Crippled Elk that stands before you, but the Lakota war shaman Shatter Eye!"

A column of flame rose out of the earth behind Crippled Elk, followed an instant later by a roar. Crippled Elk stood motionless before the fire, his hands upraised.

"Shatter Eye!" a man shouted, and the

crowd took up the chant. "Shatter Eye! Shatter Eye! Shatter Eye!" The throng began to circle the fire. Crippled Elk joined them, dancing with feverish abandon. Faster and faster they circled the flame, their cries becoming incoherent until finally they sounded like the ululating yips of a pack of wolves.

Crouched among the rocks, Butcher dug through his pack until he found the package of greasepaint, a Joker Halloween kit from Ben Franklin. Working in darkness, he smeared his face with bands of black and green from the hair-line to below the chin. He wore a shirt made of buffalo hide decorated



## CONCLUSION

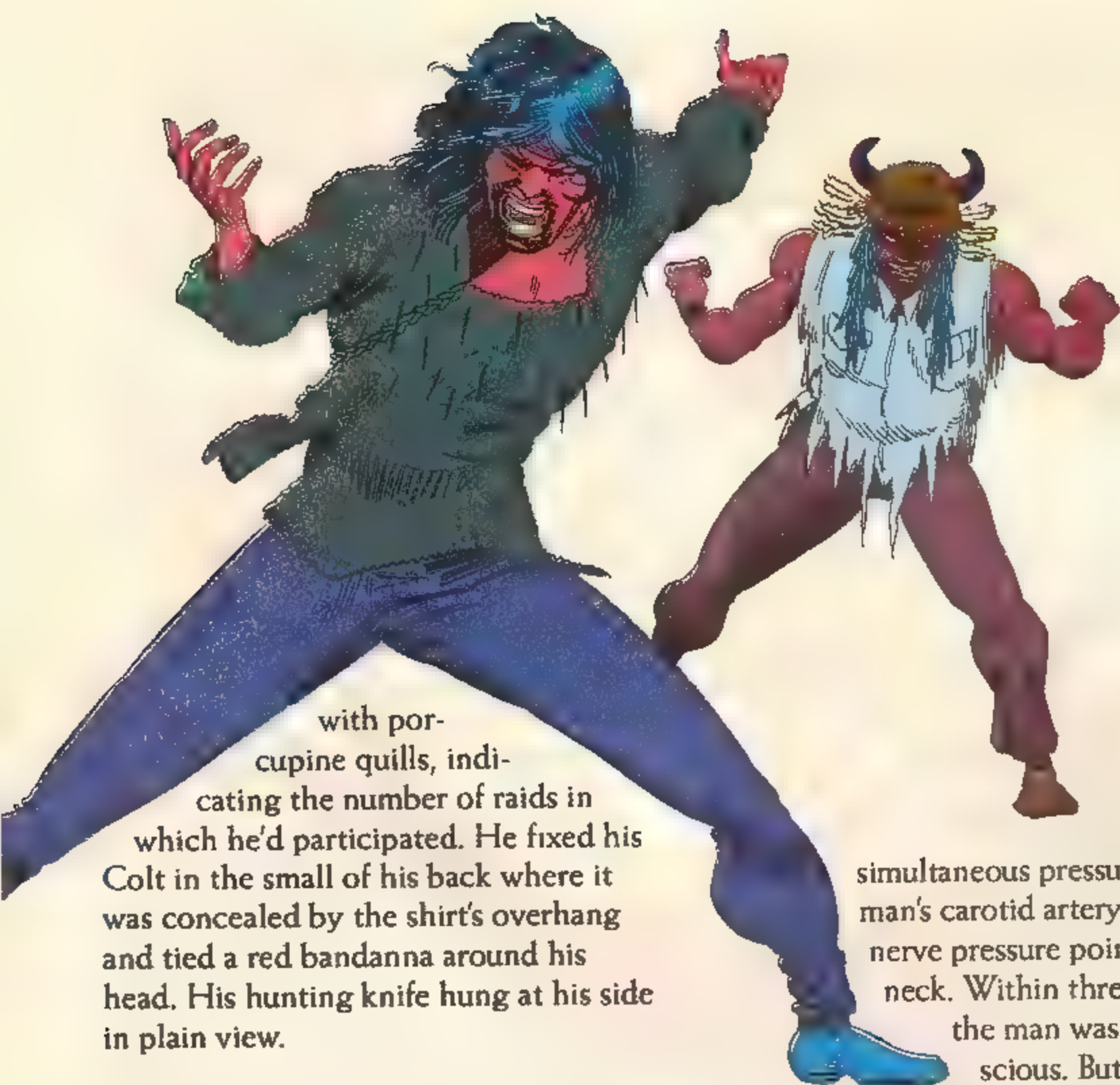
MIKE GOLD  
EDITOR

•  
DEAN MOTTER  
DESIGN

# DANCE

SHEA ANTON PENSA • ILLUSTRATOR





with porcupine quills, indicating the number of raids in which he'd participated. He fixed his Colt in the small of his back where it was concealed by the shirt's overhang and tied a red bandanna around his head. His hunting knife hung at his side in plain view.

Lastly, Butcher removed three phosphorus grenades from his pack. If Crippled Elk rode in on a column of flame, Butcher would ride in on three. Silently, Butcher crept from his hiding place, circled the eastern edge of the plateau, planting his grenades ten feet apart at the very rim of the rock. Butcher knew the burning phosphorus would keep them cemented to the rock until the phosphorus was exhausted, then they would tumble over the edge. It was an old Special Forces trick. When he was satisfied that they were well placed, he ran from one to the next pulling the pins, then whirled to face the fire. Twenty feet away stood a sentry, also facing the fire. Butcher slipped silently behind him and applied

simultaneous pressure to the man's carotid artery and a nerve pressure point in his neck. Within three seconds the man was unconscious. Butcher

lowered him carefully to the ground.

WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP! The triple shock nearly threw Butcher on his face but he recovered and stood tall as the chanting circle stopped and stared. Butcher could see his statue, outlined as if at high noon, stretching toward the fire in the light of the phosphorus grenades. They burned for at least fifteen seconds and were much brighter than the bonfire, or the gasoline fire Crippled Elk had used.

In the moment of silence, as some Indians reached for their weapons, Butcher called out in a loud, firm voice, "I am Shatter Eye. Who steals my name?"





There was a series of sharp metallic clicks as weapons were cocked. Butcher stood his ground, arms upraised, palms toward the fire. "I am Shatter Eye! Who steals my name?"

Crippled Elk quickly regained his composure. The barrel-like figure began to approach with an ominous rolling gait. Some Indians had circled behind him, but by then the grenades had exhausted themselves and tumbled over the rim.

Someone found the unconscious guard and shouted.

At last Crippled Elk and Butcher stood face to face. It was appropriate that Butcher faced west and Crippled Elk faced east, along the black path of war. Both men folded their arms across their chests and regarded each other as two mighty chiefs meeting for the first time.

"I am Shatter Eye," Crippled Elk asserted in a steady voice. "Who are you?" "I am Shatter Eye, little man," Butcher replied, adding the gratuitous insult.

Crippled Elk stepped forward so that their faces were within two feet of one another, and spoke quietly in a voice meant just for him. "You're one very brave, crazy, and stupid mother. One word from me and you're a piece of

Swiss cheese. Give me one reason why I shouldn't give it."

Butcher turned to address the crowd which now circled them. Incongruously, he thought of playing Marc Antony in his high school production of Julius Caesar, and how he had despised being forced to act in a meaningless white man's ritual.



"The little man has threatened to shoot me with the white man's weapons! I have died before — I am not afraid. But why is the little man afraid to fight me? I would think him brave, to

claim my name, unless he is a faker, like the white man, and sought to trick you." Then he repeated the whole thing in Lakota. In Lakota, he asked Crippled Elk, "What is the matter? Don't you speak the language?"

Crippled Elk turned on his heel and strode out of the circle, unaware that Butcher walked right behind him. "Shoot him," Crippled Elk commanded, gesturing back toward the circle, surprised to find the circle empty, momentarily befuddled by Butcher's disappearance. Butcher had turned behind him as expertly as Bugs Bunny avoiding Elmer Fudd's shotgun. His deft, ballet-like movement

brought smiles of appreciation and a smattering of laughter from the onlookers. Wankan Tanka was smiling on his enterprise.

Grinning, Butcher said, "Why does he not speak the language?" He repeated his question in Lakota. Several of the men understood and began turning to the others, explaining what he had said. Now you couldn't pay them to shoot Butcher. They sensed a challenge to their leader and like independent warriors everywhere, wanted to know the outcome.

Crippled Elk sensed this turning of loyalties and reached for his pistol. Butcher had been waiting for the move and responded by whipping the butt of his hunting knife down on Crippled Elk's wrist with sufficient force to shatter an ordinary man's bones. Crippled Elk dropped the gun and swung with his left, a swift, brutal jab which Butcher barely managed to avoid, jerking his head back.

Butcher danced away laughing. "Ah! I see the little man rises to the challenge!" he said in Lakota. "Very well, little man! Do not be in such a hurry! I will send you to the land of your ancestors soon enough." He was gratified to hear the men repeat his words in English. He could sense their growing doubt about Crippled Elk. Why couldn't the man speak Lakota? Who controlled the magic?



Carefully, Butcher raised his shirt to reveal the gun. Slowly, he unstrapped the holster belt, held it up for all to see, and hurled it into the darkness. Men went after it at once. Butcher had deliberately chosen the heavy old .45 automatic because it was an antique — the type of gun Shatter Eye would have recovered from U.S. cavalry in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

"This guy's a fake!" Crippled Elk shouted. "You know me! You know what I've done for you — so he speaks Lakota! Big deal! How many of you speak Lakota? He's probably an FBI agent!"

"He calls me the fake," Butcher shouted in Lakota. "He says it's a trick I speak the people's language and he does not! How stupid does he think you are? Enough talk, little man! You claim to be me — show me. Shatter Eye is a great Warrior! The real Shatter Eye will kill the fake Shatter Eye!" It just slipped out and he was stuck with it. But somehow he knew these men wouldn't be satisfied with a best two out of three, nor would Crippled Elk accept defeat.

They circled each other, lit by the bonfire



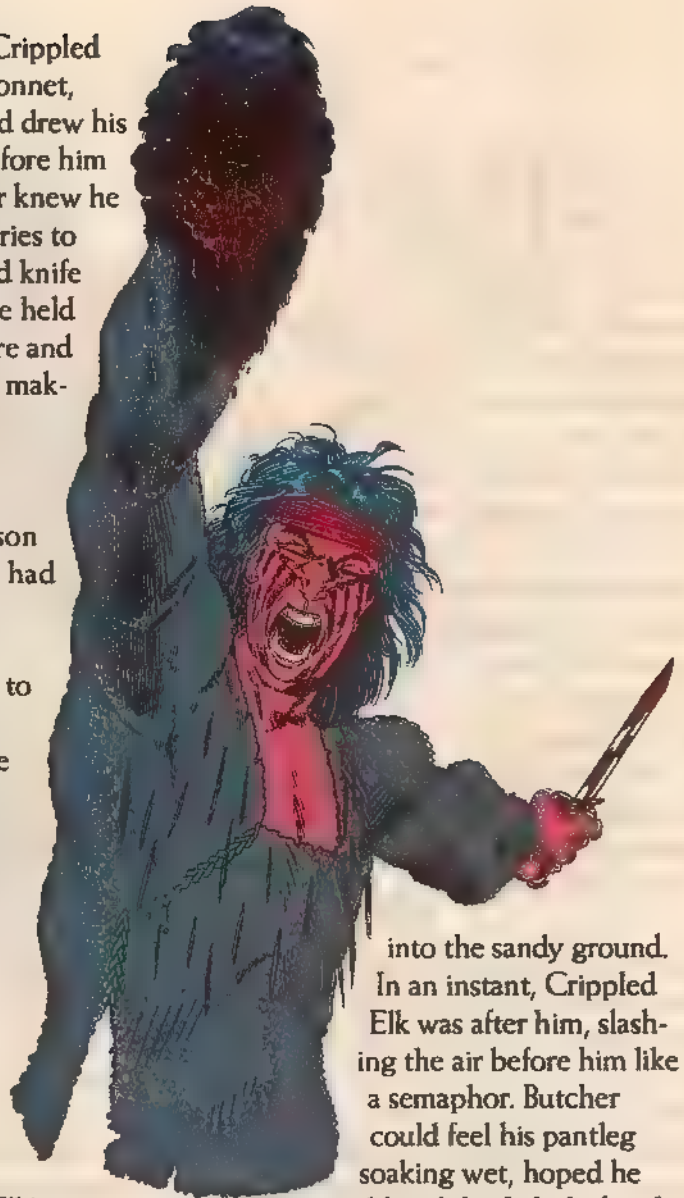
and the light of the full moon. Crippled Elk removed the buffalo horn bonnet, handed it to Wesley Wilson, and drew his hunting knife, holding it low before him with the blade tilted up. Butcher knew he would have to sustain some injuries to persevere against an experienced knife fighter such as Crippled Elk. He held his own blade in a similar posture and they danced around each other, making tentative swipes.

From the corner of his eye, Butcher could see Wesley Wilson peering at him, uncertain if he had been recognized.

Crippled Elk committed himself to a forward thrust — Butcher wheeled to one side avoiding the blade with an aikido motion, countering with his own knife inside Crippled Elk's armpit. But the shorter man was surprisingly quick — he clamped his arm down, trapping Butcher's knife hand. Crippled Elk slashed down, cutting through Butcher's pants. Butcher could feel the blade sliding off his shinbone.

Gripping the back of Crippled Elk's arm with his trapped knife hand, he simultaneously worked the knife up into the shoulder blade while firing a vicious elbow strike with his free hand. Crippled Elk's nose flattened with a crunch, but the shorter man did not even pause. With enormous strength, he reached across with his free hand, grabbed Butcher by the hair and threw him to the ground.

Crippled Elk leapt upon the prostrate Butcher, who rolled out of the way, barely escaping Crippled Elk's knife as it thunked



into the sandy ground. In an instant, Crippled Elk was after him, slashing the air before him like a semaphor. Butcher could feel his pantleg soaking wet, hoped he could end the fight before he was weakened by loss of blood.

Butcher grabbed a handful of dirt and threw it in Crippled Elk's face. It failed to stop the war shaman's rush as he barrelled into Butcher's mid-section, carrying him to the ground with a bone-rattling shock. Their arms locked, empty hand against knife hand, one on each side. They rolled in the dirt, the blades dipping in and out, nicking an ear, a cheek, until both men were cut about the face, blood and sweat mingling with the smeared warpaint.



Crippled Elk used his superior bulk to work his way on top. He held Butcher between his knees, forcing his knife, which was in his right hand, closer and closer to Butcher's face. Many things flashed through Butcher's mind — his grandfather's gentleness, his mother's love, the cry of a hawk. Crippled Elk's contorted face changed to that of Randall Corvus' and back again. He flashed on a thousand things he'd learned and forgotten and this popped into his head: Do the unexpected.

Without thinking, Butcher suddenly relaxed his pressure on Crippled Elk's knife arm, while jerking the arm to the side and twisting his head out of the way. The blade scraped along his cheek, the knuckles mashing his nose, but the hand was where he wanted it. He clamped onto Crippled Elk's smallest finger, biting through muscle and gristle to the bone, feeling his tooth crack against the metal tang of the knife.

Grinding and foaming bloody at the mouth, Butcher worked the finger until with a final jerk, it came loose. He spat it out, letting go for the shaman's knife hand and whipping his elbow back and forth across the shaman's face, which was now a bloody mess. Again Crippled Elk raised the knife, blood running down his forearm and dripping off his elbow. With a massive effort, Butcher heaved him to one side, slid his knife out from under the shaman's crushing weight, and jammed it into the floating ribs.

The shaman refused to die. With bull-like strength, he struggled to his knees, whipping his knife out blindly to ward off Butcher, spraying the crowd with blood. Butcher rolled away, got to his legs and

fired a vicious front kick into the side of the shaman's head. Crippled Elk went down but again struggled up, this time to his feet, and lunged, hissing between his teeth. Butcher stepped to one side and brought his blade down in an arc across Crippled Elk's throat.

Crippled Elk turned toward him slowly, dead on his feet but not knowing it. His heart pumped hideous gouts of blood from the gaping wound as the shaman shuffled forward through sheer force of will. Holding his knife by the handle, Butcher sank to one knee and threw it into Crippled Elk's heart from a distance of one foot. The blade sank halfway in — Butcher followed it with a palm heel thrust that drove it the rest of the way in. Crippled Elk crumpled to the ground.

Again the eerie silence as the warriors regarded him with a mixture of awe and suspicion. Wesley Wilson stood near the center of the circle, staring intently at Butcher. But the bloody, paint-smeared figure who crouched before the fallen body of their leader bore little resemblance to the biker in the Black Hills bar.

Butcher looked up. All eyes were on him. They were waiting for something — it wasn't over yet. Rolling Crippled Elk onto his belly, Butcher crouched behind him, raising his head by the thick hair at the front. With a deft slicing motion, he slipped his blade under the scalp and cut it free. Standing, he held the bloody scalp aloft, brandishing his knife in his other hand.

"Do you see, my people? This is the fate of all false prophets."



Now the assembly had closed in. There was absolute silence. As Butcher watched in horror, Wesley Wilson, who stood near the front of the mob, silently mouthed the words "Fat Boy." It was time to go.

Butcher leaped into the air, turning 360 degrees and yelping like a mad man. Brandishing the scalp aloft in one hand and his hand in the other, he ran pell-mell toward the eastern rim, yipping all the way. It took the mob five seconds to react.

"After him!" Wesley Wilson yelled, and the mob surged forward. But by then Butcher had disappeared into the shadows. With quick, deft motions, he slipped on the parachute pack, tightened the shoulder straps and fastened the strap across his chest. Backing up, he sank into a runner's crouch to get up momentum. If he failed to clear the rim of the cliff by ten feet, he would be dashed to death on the jagged protrusions.

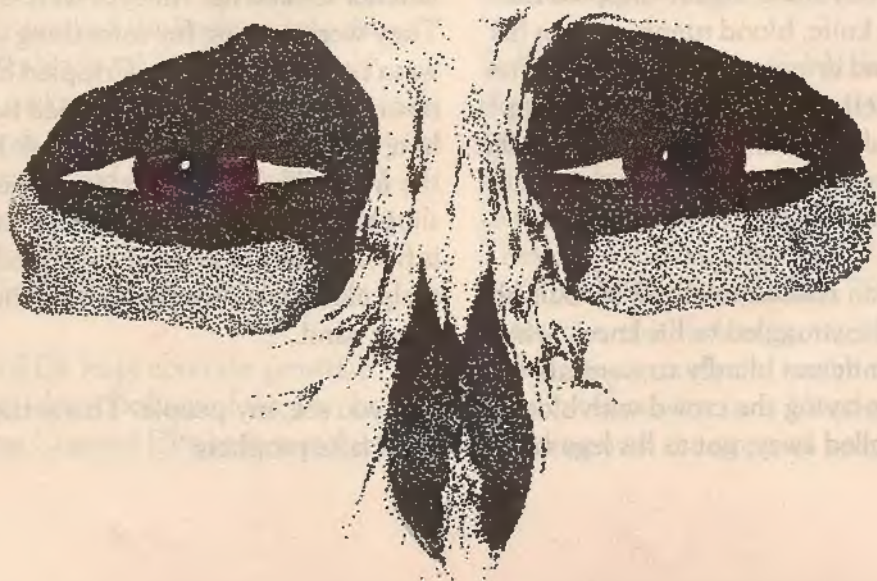
The mob was now a hundred feet away, carrying torches and powerful flashlights and screaming like madmen, whether in approbation or anger Butcher could not tell. With a final ululating shriek, he sprinted to the

edge and kicked off, disappearing into the void.

The wind rushed around him as he struggled for the release. He had only six hundred feet to deploy the chute and land or he was a pizza. Suddenly his shoulders were snapped up and the strap tightened painfully across his chest, squeezing out his breath. The ground was coming up at an alarming rate. Using the two lines that controlled the vents, he steered the parabolic 'chute counter-clockwise, circling back toward the butte, trying to hug the sides on the way down. As he swung too far back, his feet grazed one of the jagged granite protrusions, sending excruciating pain along his injured calf. An owl flew by, hung in the air adjacent to his head and momentarily regarded him from a distance of ten feet.

"Little brother," Butcher nodded. And then he hit the ground. He rolled over a series of jagged rocks before he was able to stop himself. For a second he just lay there, trying to control his breathing and praying that he hadn't broken anything. "Wankan Tanka, give me a break," he muttered.

Quickly, he gathered in the black









parachute and sliced it into strips with his knife. These he used to bind his leg, and some less serious wounds on his arms and torso. The rest of the parachute he tied in a bundle and carried with him. It was nearly dawn by the time he reached his Fat Boy, hidden by a pile of tumbleweeds in a draw a hundred feet from a dirt road.

Ignoring the pain in his leg, he reached Perry Thigpen's house on the Belle Fourche Reservation in two hours. Still no sign of Perry. The interior stank of stale liquor, beer, and cigarettes, and the scarred wood floor was covered with newspapers, gun, girlie, and sports magazines.

Butcher took a shower, cleaned and bandaged his leg. He was trying to straighten out the mess in the living room when a wave of fatigue washed over him. He barely made it to the sofa before collapsing.

Butcher woke to the sound of Perry's pickup laboring up the rutted drive. The truck stopped, the door slammed, and Perry thumped up the broken wooden steps and through the screen door. He stopped in the middle of the room when he saw Butcher lying on the sofa.

"Man, you wouldn't believe what I saw last night."

Butcher sat up, tried to stretch, but quit when the pain became too great. "What's that, man?"

Perry stood stock-still in the middle of the room, peering at Butcher with feverish intensity. There seemed to be smudges of paint or make-up around Perry's eyes. He stepped up to the sofa and looked at Butcher's bandaged leg.

"You!" he hissed. "You were on the butte last night! You tried to kill Shatter Eye!"

"What are you talking about, man?"

"Why would you want to do that, John? Why would you want to kill the greatest Lakota leader in a hundred years?"

Butcher sighed. "Because, man, he's not a great leader. He's a sucking charlatan, a madman, a screwball, and if you guys had gone ahead with his plans, you would have provoked a law and order backlash that would have set the Indian movement back a century."

"You're wrong, man. You don't know what you're messing with. You turned your back on the old ways and now they don't work for you. But they work for us. I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

"What do you mean, Perry? What did you mean when you said I 'tried' to kill Shatter Eye?"

"I mean after you leaped off the cliff, Shatter Eye's wounds closed. His hair grew back. In one hour, we're moving on the Federal Courthouse in Rapid City — our agents are already in place."

E N D